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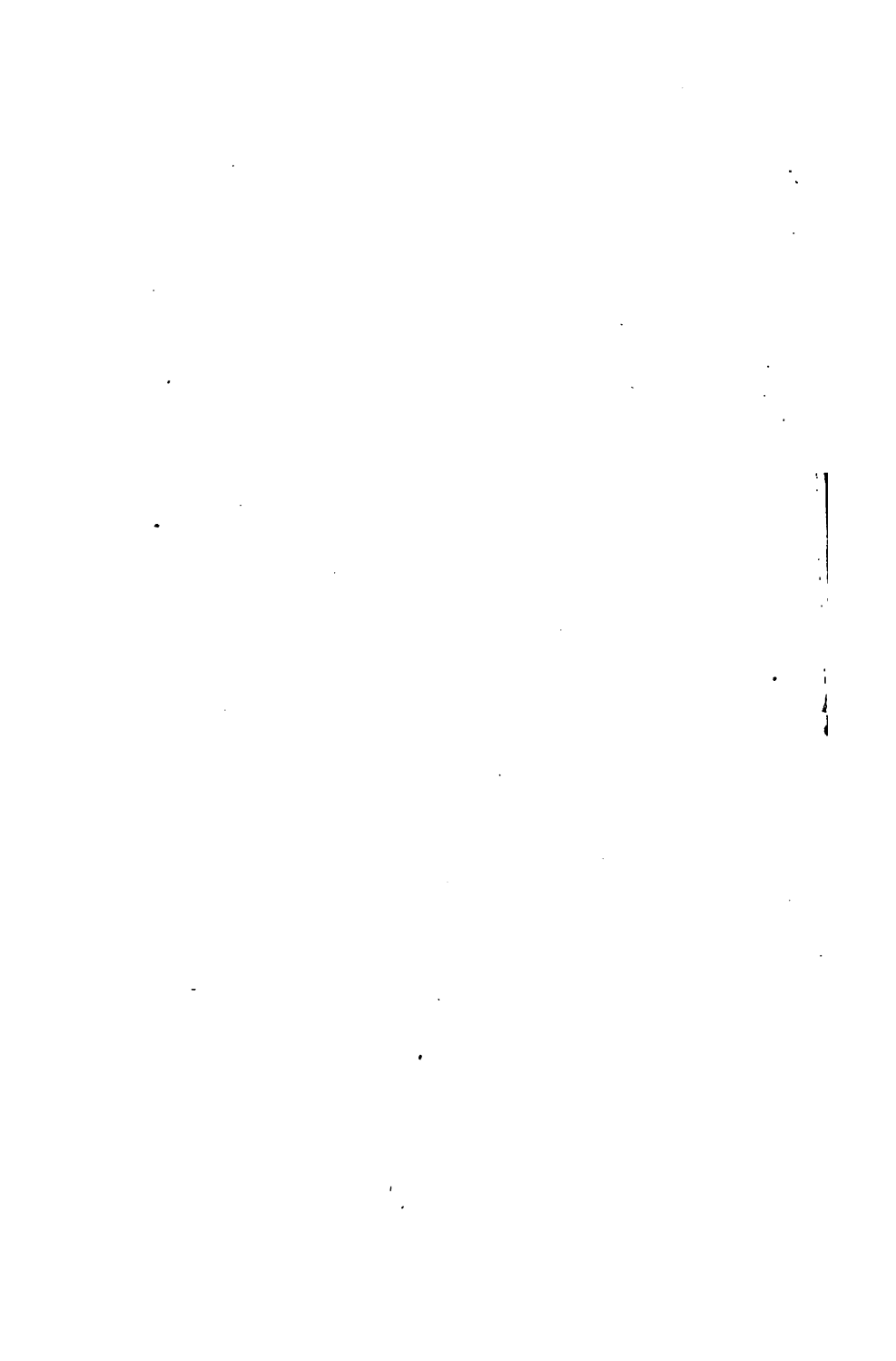
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## **A CRY OF YOUTH**



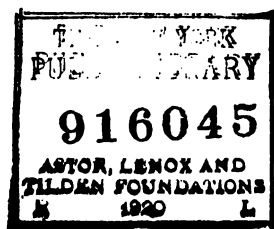
# A CRY OF YOUTH

BY  
CYNTHIA LOMBARDI



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NEW YORK LONDON

1920



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TO  
DR. ST. CLAIR SMITH  
THIS STORY IS  
AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED



**“ Like the keen-visioned eagle, the tender-eyed dove,  
So sees the Guardian Angel, Love.  
He spreads his mantle o’er every sin,  
But Love will have all pure within.”**



# CONTENTS

## PART I

CHAPTER		PAGE
I	ROSE OF DESTINY . . . . .	3
II	BY THE ARCH OF TITUS . . . . .	15
III	THE GODMOTHER'S STORY . . . . .	23
IV	THE STREET OF THE SERPENTS . . . . .	34
V	THE ANCIENT WINE CELLAR . . . . .	40
VI	LEARNING NEW ETHICS . . . . .	55
VII	THE WEAVING OF THE FATES . . . . .	70
VIII	"AMORE MIO!" . . . . .	79
IX	AN UNEXPECTED BLOW . . . . .	93
X	"A MAN SET APART" . . . . .	101
XI	THE ROSARY . . . . .	111
XII	LEFT ALONE . . . . .	116

## PART II

XIII	THE CASTLE IN UMBRIA . . . . .	129
XIV	THE MOON-LIT STAIR . . . . .	138
XV	THE HIDING PLACE . . . . .	156
XVI	COUNTING THE COST . . . . .	166
XVII	THE LITTLE ONE . . . . .	180
XVIII	"THE EVIL EYE" . . . . .	198
XIX	THE SPELL WORKS . . . . .	217
XX	THE TOMB ON THE MOUNTAIN . . . . .	230

## *Contents*

CHAPTER	PAGE
XXI THE GLOOM OF THE WINTER . . . . .	244
XXII THE LOST JEWELS . . . . .	255
XXIII THE PASSAGE IN THE CRYPT . . . . .	269
XXIV "WHERE CUPID GUARDS AND DOLPHINS SWIM" . . . . .	286
XXV THE MURDERER . . . . .	303

### PART III

XXVI LEARNING THE TRUTH . . . . .	327
XXVII AN ORDER FROM ROME . . . . .	339
XXVIII TWO LITTLE SHOES . . . . .	348
XXIX TESTED AND TRUE . . . . .	356
ENVOI . . . . .	360

— IF FINE —

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# A CRY OF YOUTH

## CHAPTER I

### ROSE OF DESTINY

He was a boy when first we met;  
His eyes were mixed of dew and fire,  
And on his candid brow was set  
The sweetness of a chaste desire.  
But in his veins the pulses beat  
Of passion, waiting for its wing,  
As ardent veins of Summer heat  
Throb through the innocence of Spring!

BAYARD TAYLOR.

That afternoon when Margaret Randolph was left alone it was a relief. She fairly hated Mrs. Kotrell whose profession it was to chaperon "educationally" young girls of wealth; but in Margaret's case the arrangements were different, for Margaret was cursed with what in her class is the greatest of curses — poverty.

Three months before she had come to Rome to be with Mrs. Kotrell. The terms had been that Margaret was to pay her a small sum in money, and make up the full amount due by being generally useful; but there had seemed nothing for her to do except write a few letters for "Madame," arrange the flowers, pour tea in the afternoons, and start the French conversation at the table. She was constantly told that she was costing more than her services were worth; and the servants soon realized that there was some difference between the Signorina Randolph and the other young ladies, and all but one treated her accordingly.

Moreover, she was criticized and found fault with from morning till night; she had to watch the other girls squander money while she must *deny herself*.

She had stopped at home to-day because she could not afford to go with the others.

Margaret stood now in the corridor of the apartment occupied by the Kotrell contingent with the sharp "good-by" of the elder woman still in her ears. She was both unhappy and homesick, and she felt so "out of it,"

A door opened and a sweet-faced Italian woman appeared wearing a spotless white apron and had a gray knitted shawl over her shoulders. She was Giacinta, duenna-maid to the young ladies.

"Come into the study, Signorina; it is cold and draughty out here," and she stood aside for Margaret to pass in.

"See," continued the woman, "I have here some tea and *dolci*," and she pointed to a tray where the steaming tea-pot and plate of pastry tarts looked very tempting.

Margaret knew that Giacinta liked her, for she could not afford the large fees the other girls gave, yet the woman was even more attentive to her than to them.

"Dear Giacinta," Margaret said, very much touched, "if I ever have a home of my own I shall send for you to come to my country and live with me."

"*Grazia*," Giacinta answered, making a slight deferential movement of appreciation, "I will surely come;" then taking the empty cup from Margaret's hand, added, "why not go for a walk, cara Signorina? Stay out until 'Ave Maria,' and when you return I will have a bath heated for you — *Vada*, Signorina — *vada*."

Taking the advice, Margaret soon found herself following the street that leads straight to the steps of the Capitol. When she gained the top she paused for a moment to rest. It was the first time she had ever been out alone in Rome.

Such a sense of freedom! How she hated the stiff afternoon promenade with Madame and the girls; she had always longed to prowl about by herself and go where she chose. So turning to the left of the Campidoglio, she passed the Marmertime

Prison and walked on and on through small, narrow streets, until at last there was the sign "Via Colosseo," and she saw looming before her the gigantic ruin of the Colosseum.

She had wandered a good distance enjoying the clear, frosty December air, and her new-found liberty.

From the Colosseum she strolled over to the Arch of Titus and stood before the railing enclosing the Forum, gazing upon its desolation. Then she noticed at her left a half concealed road which ran alongside numerous brick ruins:— she would see where it led.

It followed the brick ruins for a space, then turned into a picturesque path which had a high wall of masonry on one side and on the other, through the bare trees and shrubbery she saw, some twenty feet below, the vast area of the decaying Palatine.

In the wall of masonry which was crumbling away in places was a gate with rusty iron bars boarded up from the inside. Above it, with a small coping of stonework to serve as a frame, was an old faded fresco.

An artist with a blond beard was seated before his easel making a copy of the gate-way.

Margaret paused and addressed him: "Pardon me, sir, may I ask what place this is?"

The artist lifted his eyes from his work and said, "I speak not English."

Margaret repeated the question in French and he answered this time in the same language and with the courtesy that one foreigner in Rome usually extends to another. He told her that the wall enclosed the grounds of a mediæval monastery built on the site of Nero's "Golden House." He advised her to go and see the old buildings at the top of the hill. Then glancing at the sinking sun, he put away his brushes, folded his "kit," and politely wishing her "*bon soir*" took himself down the path up which she had just come.

She thought perhaps it might be better to follow him so as

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Such a sense of freedom! How she hated the stiff promenade with the duenna and the girls; she had never before to prowling about herself and go where she pleased. She went to the Campidoglio.

to be sure of her way back — it was growing late; but the exploring mood was on her, so on she went ascending the road that turned again into an avenue of tall eucalyptus trees walled on either side where Stations of the Cross were set in at regular intervals. At the top was an old church of the same dull masonry. There were some rambling, battered buildings attached to the church, and the whole was picturesque and ancient.

The place seemed deserted; there was not a sign of life anywhere.

Margaret felt as if she had left the world far away, and while she enjoyed the artistic beauty of it, there was a sense of dreadful loneliness. How she would have liked a congenial companion, someone for whom she cared, and who cared for her. There was dear, good Giacinta, but she was a servant. Oh, for someone in her own class of life, just a friend! All the other girls at the "school" were happy, and each one had found her "chum," and she was so different! A wave of youthful bitterness rushed over her starting the tears. She put her handkerchief to her eyes; she could cry here for she was all alone.

The shutting of a heavy door made her look up. A monk in the brown habit of a Franciscan had left the building and was coming down the path. The wind soughed through the leafless trees and blew a sharp gale. Margaret shivered and the monk drew his pointed hood over his head. Margaret's tears were flowing fast; she had not cried for a long time, and now had quite lost control of herself. The monk was close beside her; he stopped! "*Che cosa ha, Signorina?*"

Margaret turned away; she was ashamed of her tears. He repeated the question, at the same time asking if he could help her. His voice was refined and musical; she felt obliged to answer. She wiped her eyes and turned towards him; as she did so an exclamation escaped her lips and she stood staring at him, unable to speak. The face before her was the most won-

derful into which she had ever looked. He was very young, too young to be in Holy Orders: he must still be in his novitiate, she thought. From under his hood came thick clustering locks, raven black, and his eyes were marvelous! They were wide open, round and clear, of a tawny-yellow brown, and the thick curling lashes helped to make them like scintillating stars. His features had all the chiseled beauty of Grecian art and there was a rich crimson over his olive complexion denoting happy, healthy youth. This was the most radiant countenance she had ever beheld. He was carrying some long slips from a rose bush, carefully tied with cord, and, loosely, one big red rose.

"*Che cosa ha?*" he repeated again.

Margaret found her voice. "I am unhappy," she said.

"Ah, *forestiera*," he answered, recognizing her foreign accent. "And why unhappy?"

Margaret's Italian was very limited; so hesitatingly, she replied:

"I live — with — people — I love not."

"Ah," he said again, "have you no other friends, Signorina?"

"No."

"That is sad; where may the Signorina live?"

"Oh, a — long — distance — from here, and I — have — lost my way."

"I will show you the way," he said. "Come." They started down the path, the young man ahead. Every now and then he would turn and ask her a question: "Have you been long in Italy?"

"Three months."

"And what may be the Signorina's country?"

"America; I am from the United States, the City of New York."

"Ah, *Nuova Yorka*! Is it as beautiful as Rome?"

"Very different. Here — all — is — old, there all new."

"And do you not like Rome, Signorina?"

"No."

The young Franciscan stopped, horrified. "What," he exclaimed, "you do not like *Roma, bella Roma!*"

Margaret felt she owed an explanation. "I have not — been — happy — here — I have — no — friends — I — cannot — speak — your language."

He smiled, and the smile was exquisite, as he said consolingly, "You will speak soon, Signorina, I will pray for it. You must not be unhappy. I am never unhappy, never!"

The radiance of his face verified his words. It was a countenance that looked as if no sorrow, no pain, no care, no perplexity, not the shadow of a doubt or fear, had ever passed over it.

They had reached the Colosseum now and he pointed with the rose to a clump of brick-work near them, and explained that it was the remains of the pedestal upon which a colossal statue of the wicked Emperor Nero had once stood; and placing the rose between his even, white teeth, he picked up a small stone and flung it at the ruins with the words — "*Cattivo Nerone!*" As he raised his arm, the loose sleeve of his habit fell away, and Margaret could see that it was strong and symmetrical. Taking the rose from his mouth he smiled again, and Margaret found enough Italian to express her admiration for it.

It was an unusual rose, big and rich in form and color, yet most delicate in texture, and it exhaled a rare, subtle perfume. A look of pride passed over his face, and he said, "The Signorina makes me a double compliment, for I have charge of the rose-beds — I. These roses I cultivate myself, and I can make them bloom all winter. I carry now a few slips to the Nuns of San Guiseppe, who also wish to raise them: I love my roses, *tanto — tanto!*" Then, with a slight flush, as if ashamed of his enthusiasm, he tossed the flower up his ample sleeve, and moved on.

"If you will take me as far as the Church of the Gesù," Margaret said as they proceeded, "I can find my way from there."

They continued their walk, he going first and she following. He held his head high and had a fine, bold carriage, and it was difficult for her to keep up with his long, easy strides. It was that free, graceful walk of ancient races unhampered by modern dress. He might have the blood of the Cæsars in his veins, she thought, and yet his features were not Roman; their soft contour and rich coloring, bespoke more the blood of the South. At intervals as they threaded their way through the crowded streets, he would turn back and smile encouragingly, and each time she drew near him she detected the odor of his splendid rose. Arriving at the church, she said,—“I am going in,” and this time he followed her.

Margaret would have given a great deal to speak Italian fluently, and as they might not talk in the street, she wished to make an opportunity to try and thank him as best she could; so she said after entering, “It is very kind of you to bring me here,” and, holding out her hand, “I thank you.”

He bowed low as he took it with the air of a courtier. “It is nothing,” he said, “I am happy to be of service,” then followed several long sentences of which she could only understand a few words, though he repeated them, so there was nothing to do but thank him once more and say “good-bye.”

Thinking he might possibly follow her, instead of going directly from the church she crossed over to the small chapel near the tomb of St. Ignatius Loyola. It happened to be empty, and she knelt down.

Benediction service was being held, and the familiar music of the “Tantum ergo” and the odor of incense were soothing and restful. She remained for some moments, not praying, only thinking. All at once she felt a sort of magnetic current go through her entire body—the young creature in the brown habit *was kneeling beside her.*

There was scent of red roses in the air, the choir sounded like angels' voices, and the chapel seemed flooded with a dazzling, supernatural light. She closed her eyes to let the wondrous, novel sensation fill her soul; then the singing of the choir ceased, and all was still.

Suddenly from the seven hills of the old, old city the bells rang out the sunset "Ave Maria."

She opened her eyes, the lights had vanished and she was alone; but on the spot where the young monk had knelt was a red rose.

The next morning Margaret awoke with the sense of having vaguely dreamed. She had been walking up a road with tall trees on either side. An artist with a blond beard had taken her into the church of the Gesù and shown her a picture painted by himself of a young saint in a brown habit, with great tawny eyes and a beautiful mouth. All through the day the eyes seemed following her and the mouth smiling.

She felt brighter than she had for weeks, as if she had been drinking sparkling wine and its buoyancy had not yet passed off.

She had to go to the bank with "Madame," write some letters, accompany the girls to the Rospigliosi Gallery, and it was not until late in the afternoon that she was free to think over the events of yesterday. Then she stood by the drooping rose on her table and seemed to dream again. While Giacinta helped her dress for dinner, Margaret asked if she knew of any Convents or Monasteries on the Palatine Hill.

"There is the old Convent of the Visitation Nuns, Signorina, which the Government broke up; it has been abandoned for some years."

"Are you sure there is no one living in it, no friars in brown habits," she asked again.

"No one lives in it, unless it be brown owls."

"I am sure there is a monastery not far from the Arch of Titus."

"I know of nothing near there, cara Signorina, but many ruins."

Margaret was determined at the very first opportunity to try and find the place again.

She had now something to interest her and she felt better for it.

She was romantic without being sentimental, and of an adventurous spirit, and hated the common-place, but her limited means gave her very little scope for anything else.

She remembered a luxurious childhood, and an indulgent father who one day was found dead; his fortune had vanished, it seemed, and there was almost nothing left for his widow and two little daughters.

The sisters were taken from their fashionable school, and there were years of cheap flats, shabby clothes, and summers in town.

Their mother secured a position as "Social Secretary" to a prominent society leader to whom she went every day, but it was only with the utmost economy that she could make two ends meet, and she was almost breaking down under the strain when a cousin of their father's, the wealthy Mrs. Cornelia Ward, who had been living in California, returned to her New York home and became greatly interested in the two girls.

Josephine, the elder, was very handsome; she had sunny brown hair, brilliant coloring, and a rather dashing manner. Margaret was small, quieter than her sister, but with a clear active mind. Though not exactly pretty, she had some almost beautiful points. Her dark brown hair was unusually long and thick, her eyes were dark brown with finely marked eyebrows, and she had a pure white skin. Her nose belonged to no particular class, and her mouth was sweet with pretty little teeth; but her chief charm lay in a certain wistful expression that made strangers turn to look at her again, and impressed her face upon their memory.

Cousin Cornelia Ward had taken the two girls to live with

her. She would dress them and give them opportunities, and indeed shortly afterwards Josephine was married to handsome young Philip Dacre, a gentleman of excellent family, possessed of a rich and doting grandmother. It was a genuine "love-match," and Josephine was supremely happy in a smart establishment of her own.

Then a Mr. Grant, who was Mrs. Ward's business manager, came from California. He was about thirty-eight, plain in appearance, but a successful, rising man. The "Salt of the Earth," Cousin Cornelia had called him, and talked to Margaret a great deal about the wealth he was accumulating, and the name he was making.

Margaret thought Wallace Grant the most uninteresting individual she had ever met, and to her annoyance she felt that he liked her. However, this was much to Mrs. Ward's satisfaction; she had made up her mind to marry off both of her attractive young cousins advantageously.

Margaret understood her hopes, but she was only nineteen and she wished to be in love with the man she married, and have something romantic and beautiful come into her life, and not sell herself to a "bore" double her age. Had she not as much right to love and happiness as her sister? But she had to be very polite to him for Cousin Cornelia's sake.

One afternoon upon going into the library she had found Mrs. Ward and Wallace Grant talking confidentially, and later Cousin Cornelia had sent for her to come to her room and closed the door.

"I have had a letter from your mother," she said, "asking me to help her, and am sending her a check. You know, Margaret, that when I undertook to provide for you two girls I thought that being relieved from the expense of her daughters your mother would be able to get along without further assistance; but it seems she has run into debt and her creditors are *making trouble*. I wish with all my heart you were as happily *settled as Jo is* —" Cousin Cornelia paused; "if any good

man — who you know can give you the home that your station in life requires, should ask you to marry him, I would not be too particular. That is all, dear."

Margaret had stumbled up to her room shocked and distressed. Oh, why, why had her mother done this? Cousin Cornelia had been so generous and lavish to them — oh, it was too mortifying!

That same evening Mr. Grant poured forth a torrent of love.

He had cared for her the moment he saw her, though he did not dare to hope, there was so much difference in their ages, but to-day Mrs. Ward had given him some encouragement. He had been too busy making money to give marriage a thought until he had met her. Would she be his wife?

And Margaret had taken her cue and said "yes."

The preparations for the wedding had been hastened, the invitations were out, the bridal gown was in the house, but no one knew of the tears Margaret shed in private, nor of the agony of mind she was in. She would infinitely rather go back to her mother and battle with dire poverty than bind herself for life, young as she was, for Margaret had been reared in the Catholic faith to believe that marriage was an indissoluble tie.

But she dared not assert herself. She was fond of Cousin Cornelia though a little afraid of her, and dreaded her anger; however, as the wedding-day drew near she felt she would rather die than marry Wallace Grant. She hated him, *hated him*, so in a moment of courage and desperation, she scribbled a note to Wallace breaking the engagement, and another to Cousin Cornelia thanking her for all she had done for her, then had hurriedly slipped out of the imposing mansion on upper Fifth Avenue, back to the cheap, semi-dark apartment, and had sobbed her heart out in her mother's arms.

Then followed terrible days. The scoldings of Josephine, the indignation of Cousin Cornelia for daring to allow matters to proceed *so far*. *Back out now?* Then she washed her

hands of her entirely from henceforth; worst of all was the heart-broken resignation of Wallace Grant.

Only her mother, though profoundly disappointed, had taken her part. Mrs. Randolph had just met Mrs. Kotrell (who appeared charming in New York) and the mother sold one of her solitaire rings to send Margaret to Rome. She thought it might be better for the youngest daughter to go far away for a while, and at the same time begin to learn to be self-supporting.

So Margaret, knowing the sacrifices that her mother had made, kept most of her trials from her; writing home as cheerfully as possible; though in reality only unpleasant, disagreeable, wounding things had happened, until that day when she had seen a wonderful face peeping out of a brown hood, in vivid contrast to her own sadness.

## CHAPTER II

### BY THE ARCH OF TITUS

"Life is a game in which from unseen sources,  
The cards are shuffled, and the hearts are dealt,  
Vain are all efforts to control the forces,  
Which though unseen, are no less strongly felt."

There was a week of rain, and Rome was filled to overflowing for the Christmas season. One could hardly go on the Corso without danger of having one's eyes put out by the points of multitudinous umbrellas. Mrs. Kotrell was irritable, the house cold, the girls bored from having to stay so long indoors and Margaret kept watching the sky until enough blue should appear to warrant her venturing out on a long ramble, for she meant to try and find again the romantic path she felt sure lay somewhere near the Arch of Titus.

As to that strange youth in the brown habit, she had but the slightest clue to go on. She did not even know his name only that he had told her he had the care of the rose-beds. But she made her plans. She took a picture card suitable for Christmaside, and on the back of it wrote, "From the American who lost her way," and the date, "December 12, 19—"; then she put the little token in an envelope with a twenty-five lire note. She knew that she must have some excuse for wishing to see him and besides at Christmas she always made some donation to the poor. All religious communities, she knew, had poor whom they helped.

At last the rain had ceased and she had a free afternoon. As she passed the church of the Gesù, she decided to stop there first. Dropping a coin for good luck to the beggar who held aside the heavy leather curtain for her to enter, she went straight to the side chapel near the Tomb of St. Ignatius and *knelt down*.

While for a quarter of an hour she waited there very quietly, she turned several times to see who were kneeling near her, but they were commonplace people she had never seen before, then she left the church and walked on; she did not stop until she had reached her goal, the Arch of Titus.

She looked about her. There were "many ruins," just as Giacinta had said, but she saw no path. She gave a sigh of disappointment; would she ever unravel this mystery? Well, she would go back, and she faced the Colosseum. But what was that coming towards her? Surely it was a brown-habited figure. Her heart stood still. What if it should be — that one? He was quite near now and she saw instead of the straight, elastic figure of her memory, a fat stooping old monk of unkempt appearance. But he was a ray of hope; he passed her at the distance of a few yards, then turned and disappeared in the ruins of ancient Roman brick opposite. She darted after him and saw that there was a path after all, only concealed at the angle where she had stood by the Arch. An unobserving person might go there a dozen times and never notice it. She had stumbled upon it by accident the other day.

Another turn and walls rose on either side and there was the old gateway with the faded fresco above it, only the artist was not there. But now that she had found the place how was she to find the particular monk she had come to see? There was nothing to do but ask.

The old monk seemed to find the ascent difficult, for he paused now and then to take breath. The last turning brought them to the long avenue of eucalyptus trees and the Stations of the Cross, and at the top the path ended in front of the old church. The monk paused once more but she hesitated, and yet there was no reason why she, coming to return a favor, could not ask for a member of his community who had been kind to her. The monk was now at the convent door; he was pulling a long rope, attached to a bell high up in a niche in the wall. *It rang long and loudly and echoed through chamber*

after chamber inside. She knew this was her last chance, so in a trembling voice, she ventured: "*Reverendo?*"

He turned. "Is there," she began, "I do not know his name, but I would like to see the Religious who tends the rose-beds."

The monk looked puzzled, for Margaret spoke in slow, imperfect Italian; "big, red-roses," she added.

"Ah—" Then there came the shuffle of sandaled feet over the stone pavement within, and the door was opened wide enough for to see a big, burly brother in the same brown habit.

The old monk said something to him which she could not understand; then telling her to wait he passed in, and the door was closed again. A moment after she heard the creaking of bolts and bars and the church door was opened by the same man she had followed. He motioned her to enter. Evidently no woman was allowed within the convent proper and she must settle her affairs in the church. Again the old monk told her to wait, and disappeared.

She looked about her; the church was small and dimly lighted by one large window over the door. The stone flooring was covered with marble tablets so old and worn that their inscriptions were almost illegible.

Above the high altar was a lattice, and she thought she saw a figure behind it looking down upon her.

There was a devotional atmosphere about the little church; there were no irreverent tourists here; it was quiet and peaceful and solitary. Instinctively she put her hand in the holy water font and made the sign of the cross.

The old monk returned and spoke to her from behind the bars. "I have sent for one of our religious," he said, "who may understand, and would not the Signorina like to see our treasured Relic, the Blessed Saint who sleeps his last sleep here."

Margaret thanked him and said she would. He opened a gate in the barred *inclosure* and she stepped inside and knelt

down. The monk turned a crank somewhere back of the altar, and the brass grill-work in front of it sank into the floor and disclosed a long glass case, inside of which reposed the body of an aged member of the Order, his folded hands clasping a crucifix, the personification of peaceful rest. A bundle of long sharp-pointed rods lay beside him, "for discipline," the monk explained, as he saw her questioning glance. Here he had lain for more than three hundred years, he told her, in a state of miraculous preservation. As she knelt in contemplation of the truly saintly countenance she felt a movement near her and looking around saw bending over her the youth she had come to find.

He was holding out his hand, "Ah — *la Signorina*;" then, "I am so glad to see you."

His manner was precisely as if he had been expecting her, his face was aglow with pleasure and the hearty greeting sounded good to her. "Did you reach home safely the other evening?" His voice was even sweeter than she remembered it, the richest, softest Italian she had ever heard and what was more, to-day she could understand all he said.

She told him "yes" and that she had come to thank him, and giving him the envelope she had brought she explained that the *lire* were for the poor, a Christmas offering. The older monk seeing money pass between them believed she had come to purchase some of the convent roses, and slipped away.

The young one thanked her with charming graciousness; he would keep the picture-card "always, always," and he told her of an old woman who needed help sadly — *poveretta* — he would take the money to her and say that a beautiful young *Signorina Americana* had sent it, "and," he added with a bright smile, "your Italian, Signorina, has improved; you speak well to-day."

Margaret answered that she had noticed herself that within the last week it had come to her much more easily. "I knew it, I knew it," he cried with delight.

"How did you know it?" she asked.

"Because," and his voice dropped a key lower, "because I have prayed that you might learn to speak my language and my prayers are always answered."

"Ah," she sighed, "how happy you must be; mine never are."

"But they will be," he said. "Do not despair, Signorina; sometimes the angels are slow in carrying our messages. Ask now this holy saint to intercede for you, that Heaven may grant what you wish, and I will pray also for your intention," and he dropped on his knees beside her.

She was to pray for what she wanted? Oh, God, she wanted so much, where was she to begin?

The young brother's eyes were closed, all his mind and soul concentrated upon the intention of her prayer, whatever it might be. She looked from the dead monk before her to the living one beside her; both were clothed in the same brown habit, both wore the knotted white cords about the waist, the same rosary hung at each man's side. The one lying under the altar was spent with years in the service of his Lord, and the kneeling one was just starting out. She glanced from the thin locks whitened by age to the black clustering curls; from the pallid visage and emaciated body of the saint to the fresh, fair face with its glow of rich color and the sturdy splendid form; from the poor dried-up corpse to the living man, the embodiment of youth and health and vigor, and the prayer for herself was suddenly cut short—she was praying for *him*, who was kneeling on the cold stones so close to her that she could feel the warmth of his body.

Crossing himself he rose. Margaret did likewise.

"It was kind of you to pray that I might soon speak Italian," she said. "I have studied it very hard lately and I feel myself that I have improved. And your prayers are always answered like this?"

"Yes," he said fervently, "I have had an answer to prayer to-day—you have come."

Margaret looked at him. "Did you want to see me again as much as that?" she asked.

"Yes, Signorina," he answered. His manner was a mixture of boldness and shyness. He lowered his eyes as a young girl might do, and their long lashes swept his cheeks. "Then," she said, "I have one friend in Rome."

"Ah, yes, yes."

"I have need of both friends and prayers."

"I will give you another friend, Signorina, if you will allow me. My godmother speaks French, also a little English. She is a lady with a great heart. She will be happy to make welcome in her house a friend of mine. Will you go to see her, Signorina?"

Margaret's spirits rose. Here was a chance of meeting him again. She replied that she would be very glad to do so.

"*Che giorno?*"

"What day?" she considered a moment. "On Wednesday."

"*Che ora?*"

"What time, oh, about four o'clock."

"*Buonissimo*," and taking from somewhere out of the folds of his habit a wallet, he opened it and began to write upon a card — "I have not the pleasure of the Signorina's name?"

"Margaret Randolph," she said.

"Marga — Ran — Rando?"

She repeated it, but he could neither spell nor pronounce it, so she took from her purse one of her own cards and showed it to him.

"Ah," he exclaimed, "Margherita."

"That is what you call it in your language."

"So hard — too hard these English names, I cannot say them, but 'Margherita' is a name *molta bella*."

He handed her the card he had written upon, she thanked him and put it in her purse. Not wishing to outstay the limits of formality she moved toward the door. He came outside

with her and as they stood in the light it seemed as if he must be some young Greek god vivified in the twentieth century.

The graceful folds of the mediæval habit exactly suited his picturesque style and the warm brown shade of the cloth seemed to enhance his rich coloring. He was almost too perfect, she thought, to be human.

But it was a very human hand that took hers, as he bade her good night; he would like to accompany her, he said, but he had duties within, "And make haste, Signorina," he added, "young ladies may not be out alone after the sun sinks behind the Janiculum."

He still held her hand; it was bare. In her haste to leave the house she had put on but one glove, and thrusting the other in her muff had not thought of it again.

Her hand was cold and trembling slightly, but his was warm and firm. He looked her straight in the eyes, "You will come Wednesday, Signorina, *senza dubbio?*" "*Senza dubbio,*" she replied. Then she turned and leaving him standing in the doorway hurried down the path. Again she had the feeling of having drunk sparkling wine. She had a friend, one friend in the great old city; he had prayed for her and wished to see her again, just as she had wished to see him. "He is not a dream, he is not a dream," she kept saying, and to reassure herself she clutched the card he had given her. It was not until she reached the Arch of Titus that she stopped to read it.

"Fra Felice Estori  
*Dell' Ordini dei Minori Francescani.*" \*

And written underneath was —

"To Donna Bianca Salviate  
Via Pansiperna, No —  
Introducing the  
Signorina Margherita Randolph."

\* Order of *Minor Franciscans.*

As she glanced towards the Forum her eyes caught sight of a broken pillar of porphyry. The last rays of the setting sun were shining full upon it; it was glistening in a warmth of purple and red and her heart had warmed too and she sped on almost happy.

Fra Felice Estori stood watching her go down the hill, until the turn of the Convent wall lost her to his view. Then he reëntered the church and bolted and barred the door. Something was lying on the floor just in front of him. He stooped and picked it up; it was a glove, so small that it must belong to some child, he thought, but no child had been here. — Then he remembered seeing its mate on his visitor's hand and pressed it to his lips.

A monk entered bearing a torch and began to light the candles upon the altar for Benediction. At his glance the younger brother quickly slipped the glove inside his habit.

## CHAPTER III

### THE GODMOTHER'S STORY

At six, I said he was a charming child,  
At twelve, he was a fine but quiet boy,  
Although in infancy he was a little wild,  
They tamed him down among them; to destroy  
His natural spirit, not in vain they toiled,  
At least it seemed so.

BYRON.

Margaret was as much interested in thinking of her visit to the godmother of Fra Felice Estori as the others were in preparing to take tea with a Roman Princess. At first her feelings had been terribly hurt not to have been included in their party. She was better born than any of them, and Mrs. Kotrell had begun by taking her everywhere; little Miss Randolph with the best blood of America in her veins was used as a sort of social prop, but Margaret had seen through it, and when Mrs. Kotrell found that Miss Randolph was not the wax in her hands that she had hoped for, the elder woman had then told everyone that Margaret was merely an assistant, a poor girl whom she was trying to help. Margaret being totally ignorant of this, was at a loss to understand the slights and snubs that had come from within and without; but now to-day nothing would tempt her to exchange her invitation for another, so anxious was she to see again the unusual, radiant young person called Felice Estori and to meet his fairy godmother as she thought the Donna Bianca of the card must be, and many times that card had been taken out and read again and again to make sure that even yet he was not a dream.

When Wednesday afternoon came she left the house before the others but no one paid her any attention except Giacinta, who was never too busy to open the door for her. Madame, if she thought of her at all except to envy her slight pretty

figure, supposed that she was going to call on the nuns at the Trinita de' Monti to whom she had brought letters from home.

As Margaret passed out down the stairs the *portiere* rose and asked her if he should call a carriage. She told him she preferred to walk.

She would have liked to have asked in what direction the Via Panisperna lay, but was afraid of gossip among the servants and it was not until she was out of sight of the house that she stopped a "*guardia*" who directed her, and she soon found the street.

She then began to have misgivings. She was actually going to a strange place, to see a strange woman and at the instigation also of a strange man — for he was a man too, if he was a monk, and she stopped, appalled at what she was doing.

Then the memory of that sweet, earnest face looking into hers scattered her fears, for there was no guile in the great eyes, only honest frankness.

Gathering up her courage she proceeded and entering the *palazzo* she ran up the first flight and calmly rang the bell. She was promptly ushered into a room where sat an elderly lady and with her Fra Felice Estori.

Donna Bianca received her most graciously, she liked to meet Americans, she said, and Estori's greeting was delightful. He spoke very slowly to her so that she might understand.

Donna Bianca spoke a little English and excellent French and she translated to Estori all they said.

"And do you not understand any English or French?" Margaret asked him.

"A little French, Signorina, no English, but I know Latin and Greek; we have more use for those languages in my life."

It was hard to associate the idea of monasticism with him, he was so young and bright and merry; there was nothing of *the poor, humble friar* in his proud carriage and princely man-

ners. That he knew the ways of the world was evident, though his *naïveté* and ingeniousness showed that he was as yet unspoiled and untouched by it.

The maid brought in a tray of cake and wine and said something to her mistress, who excused herself for a moment and left the room.

"And when will we meet again?" he asked presently.

"I do not know," Margaret answered.

"Signorina," he began hesitatingly, "will you take a walk with me? We may not walk together in the city, because I wear this," touching his habit; "but out of town a little, on a country road, it is all right and there we may talk. I have so much to say to you; will you come?"

Margaret considered. Donna Bianca's footsteps were heard returning.

"Quick, Signorina, say you will. Meet me at the Portico of Santa Maria Maggiore on the day after Christmas, at nine of the morning. If it should rain, make it the next day. I will be there; quick, say you will come?"

"I will," she said.

As Donna Bianca entered Estori rose. He was obliged to be indoors at Ave Maria at this season, he explained, but the Signorina Margherita might stay longer with Donna Bianca, it was still an hour before sunset. He bowed low as he took Margaret's hand to wish her good afternoon and when he had gone it seemed as if all the brightness had gone with him. She spoke to her hostess of his cheerful ways and sunny smile, saying it was hard for her to realize that he belonged to a religious community.

"And he does not realize it himself as yet," the lady answered, "but some day he will awaken, and then — if awakening means regret, I shall never cease to grieve that I was not here when I might have saved him from the first step. I had not seen him for five years. I might have known there was always a chance of his doing it, living for so long in that en-

vironment and now they are preparing him for the priesthood."

This was a shock to Margaret. She had not given a thought to the fact that this very young monk might eventually become a priest; it had an unpleasant effect upon her, but she only said, "Do you object to the priesthood, Madame?"

"Far from it. I honor and respect the priesthood when it is entered from conviction and careful consideration. But in this case it is nothing but environment and the urging of his elders. My husband's health required that we should travel and I could not watch over my godson and plan for him as I should have done otherwise," and Donna Bianca sighed.

"Has he no family, Madame?" asked Margaret.

"He has a mother whom he never sees. When he was thirteen years old she married again and her husband, the Marquese Pallavicino, instead of sending him properly to a good boarding-school put him in charge of a learned Franciscan Father (a friend of his) to be educated. Being placed in a monastery at an impressionable age, I believe all his teaching and training were directed to making him a member of the Order."

"But did not his mother object?" asked Margaret.

"His mother!" repeated the lady scornfully; "she soon had other children and forgot him. She has never seen him since sending him from home. His step-father, the Marquis, visits him occasionally and I am convinced it was at his instigation that Fra Felice took the step."

"Is the Marquis very religious?"

Donna Bianca smiled satirically and replied: "He had his reasons, Mademoiselle. Cavaliere Estori, the father of this boy, left a fine estate South of Naples, thousands of acres of vineyards and olive groves. His only son, coming of age would inherit it, would he not?"

"Yes."

"*Very good.* The only son is thrust into a convent and

gradually and unsuspectingly his thoughts and ideas led into the one channel. If the only son of the late Cavaliere Estori becomes a monk, and renounces the world by taking the vows of rigid poverty laid down in the rule of St. Francis of Assisi, the handsome villa and the rich, productive lands revert to his mother, and eventually to the son of Marchesa Pallavicino by her second marriage."

"Oh, I understand!" exclaimed Margaret. "How could she? How could a mother allow her child to be defrauded of his rights?"

"How could she, indeed!" Donna Bianca waxed indignant as she proceeded. "Rosalia Estori was always a vain, heartless little thing. She has nothing to recommend her but her beautiful face. She is said to be the daughter of a famous Sicilian brigand, who had her educated and chaperoned by a poor but noble lady of Palermo who received a good income for the launching of the girl. The Cavaliere Estori, during his army life in Sicily, met her, fell madly in love with her beauty and married her, much to the distress of his relatives. The Estoris are a proud race, *ma chère*; the present head of the family is Prince Francesco Estori, own cousin to this boy's father."

It was evident that Donna Bianca liked to gossip, so Margaret encouraged her to go on by asking whether if Fra Felice had stayed in the world he would not have inherited the title when the Prince died?

"Oh, no, Fra Felice is of a different line; the old Prince has a married son and lately an heir has been born to him. The Cavaliere had died when Fra Felice was very young and since then the Estoris had paid him little attention, not caring at all for his mother, though they had the grace to invite him to the baptism of the infant."

"Is the Marchesa really so beautiful?" asked Margaret, thinking of her son's good looks.

"Yes, she is, and my boy is the image of her, but he has

inherited his father's refinement and elegance of manner."

Donna Bianca rose and going to a cabinet brought out some photographs. "You will pardon an old lady's fondness for her godchild, Mademoiselle, but I believe I have always loved him better than did his own mother and his father was one of my dearest friends. See, here he is at three, this one at five, and this at fifteen," and she put the photographs in Margaret's lap.

"Oh, what a beautiful child," Margaret exclaimed.

The first was a lovely baby-face framed in curls, more like a cherub than anything else, the second a stylish, sturdy little fellow with splendid limbs, dragging a toy horse by a string, and the third rather an overgrown school boy, but with a patrician bearing about him in spite of "the awkward age."

Donna Bianca's eyes filled with tears as she handed Margaret a fourth, "and this is the last," she said.

It had the same perfect features, but with a subdued, serious look in the eyes; the clustering curls were cropped closer and showed the *tonsure* in their midst and the heavy folds of the monk's habit fell gracefully about the youthful form.

"Oh, the pity of it," sighed Donna Bianca, wiping her eyes, "it is such an awful mistake."

"Do not take it so to heart, madame," said Margaret. "I am sure he is happy; really I have never met anyone quite so lighthearted and care-free. I cannot associate trouble with Fra Felice; he seems all brightness and sunshine, almost a different creature from the rest of us."

"Yes, I know," said the older woman, "his mother impresses people in just that way, only she has not his true, loving heart."

"Does his mother live in Rome?"

"No, abroad most of the time, in Paris or Vienna, and when they come to Italy they stay either at a palace belonging to the Marchese up north, or at her estate near Naples."

*Donna Bianca* seemed determined to tell all she knew of the

family of Fra Felice, so Margaret ventured on another question, "How does he feel toward his step-father?"

"Strange as it may appear," the lady answered, "he seems on very good terms with him. The Marchese is immensely clever; it was he who visited him from time to time, always bringing some present to encourage piety, a unique rosary, a handsome crucifix, or valuable books on religious subjects, and always having some plausible excuse for the Marchesa not accompanying him; the latest baby was too young for her to leave, the weather was uncertain, his little brothers and sisters had the mumps or chicken-pox and so it would not be wise for the boy to return at present. Pallavicino has used every sort of device for weaning him from the mother and all home ties and did his best to cultivate an inclination for monastic life."

"And could no one warn him that the Marquis had a motive for doing this?"

"As I have said, Mademoiselle, I was away from Italy for several years and knew nothing until it was over and since I have thought it useless. He believes in his mother and step-father and is contented; why shake his faith in them and cause him unhappiness? But I shall always maintain that a cruel injustice has been done."

When Margaret found herself again in the street it was with rather mixed feelings. She had enjoyed her visit and had received a most cordial invitation to repeat it, but she felt somewhat depressed. Why should Donna Bianca borrow trouble for Felice Estori, who was not in the least troubled for himself. She would give anything to be as happy as he!

The next time Margaret heard the young monk discussed it was by a stranger.

On Christmas evening Mrs. Kotrell and the girls were invited to a supper-party at the Hotel Excelsior where the famous so-called "Sistine Choir" were to give a concert.

Madame and her charges created no little sensation as they appeared, all more or less richly and becomingly gowned.

Their host, an Italian banker, led the way to the table reserved for them.

Madame seated the girls, sorting them as she would a bunch of flowers for a color scheme. Margaret, small and slender, with dark hair and white skin, in a pale blue perfect-fitting gown, gave the azure; while a tall, robust blond from Chicago, dressed in pink was placed beside her.

In the supper-room was an immense Christmas tree and on its topmost branch a great electrical star. Back of this was a curtain of smilax and behind it were installed the world-renowned singers. The room was full of women in beautiful costumes and men in evening dress, and it was interesting to pick out the different nationalities represented. An Anglican clergyman and his family occupied a table near by and at another a Russian Princess sat smoking a cigarette.

At a table directly opposite Margaret sat a party of men only; wine was flowing freely and they seemed to be thoroughly enjoying themselves. They were speaking French, though they were not all of that nationality. One in particular Margaret noticed. He had deep-set blue eyes, and a blond beard; his face was familiar and it puzzled her. When had she seen him before?

There was the throb of a violin from behind the smilax curtain; some bars were struck on the piano by a masterly hand, a few notes of a harp floated through the greenery and then came a voice. The noisy room suddenly grew quiet. The voice rose, full, strong and beautiful. Some of the guests consulted their programmes and saw that the first number was "The Holy Night." With a depth of sweetness unspeakable, the singer proceeded; soft and low were his notes, then powerful, rich and mellow. There was a pathos and devotional quality in his tones that no woman's voice, were she the greatest songstress the world has ever known, could attain. Breathless and awe-struck the gay assemblage listened in silence. The hush was so complete that between the singer's

pauses one could hear the clock tick. A sob of the violin, one soft chord on the piano and the marvellous voice had ceased.

The listeners burst into a storm of applause—"Bravo," "Bravissimo," "Bravo!" There were present those who had heard the finest singers in every capital of the world, but all agreed they had never heard the equal of this voice. The male soprano of Rome is without a rival. The laughing and talking began again amid the clicking wine glasses.

One of the party of men at the table opposite was casting admiring glances at the Chicago girl in pink. He was calling her a "beauty," a "Juno," a "rose."

"A dairy-maid," answered the blond man whom Margaret had observed, "merely a fine specimen of young womanhood inclining to the Amazon type. Fine strength there, I grant you, looks as if she might do the weekly washing of the Quirinal and do it well; the small, dainty one in blue is far more attractive than she."

"What, that little pale thing beside her?"

"Yes," answered the blond man.

"What can you see in her?" questioned his companion.

"A great deal."

"Par example?"

"For example? Well, there is a patrician grace about her that no other demoiselle among them possesses."

"But surely, Fauvel, you see no beauty from an artistic standpoint?"

"Ah, but I do," replied the blond called Fauvel; "although she is slight she is all curves; her lines are perfect and her eyebrows are arched in a fine black thread; her skin is like a pearl in its delicacy, though I should judge she has as splendid health as the 'Juno.' I have seen her before, wandering alone on the Palatine. It is a face one does not forget. That little girl is not happy."

"Are you a mind-reader, Fauvel?"

"No, but, I am a reader of faces. I have studied a thou-

sand different expressions; it is my profession. Hers is a face that may not appeal to the average man, but one day some man will worship her madly. I say she is destined to have a history."

"Margaret," said the Chicago girl in an undertone, "turn round, do you see that man with the yellow hair and beard? He has been looking at you hard, do you know him?"

"No," said Margaret, glancing again at the one whose face had puzzled her, "I have seen him somewhere, but I cannot remember."

"But I know where I have seen him," the other went on, "at the Rospigliosi Gallery, making a copy of the Aurora."

Then like a flash Margaret remembered him as the artist to whom she had spoken the day she met Fra Felice. He had advised her to go up the hill and see the old monastery at the top. Indirectly he was responsible for the meeting.

Happy, handsome, bright Fra Felice! He was saying his prayers on the cold stones of the dark chapel and she thought of what Donna Bianca had told her of his being tricked out of his inheritance. At that moment she looked up and met the gaze of the blond artist full upon her, but almost immediately he turned to respond to some remarks of one of his companions.

"No, I have not secured him as yet," he was saying, "but when I do he will make my fame. Only once in a thousand years is such perfection of form and feature moulded into flesh and blood. I shall paint him as Narcissus, St. Sebastian, as Adonis, and best of all in his own true character, for he is a picture in himself."

"Where did you find him, Fauvel?" asked an Italian in the party, whom Margaret took also for an artist. "*Per Bacco!* I will hunt the Piazzo di Spagna every day myself."

"You will never find this one lounging on the Spanish Steps, after the manner of models, I can assure you."

Margaret, pretending to read her program, listened to all *they were saying*.

"What is he, Fauvel?" asked another.

"An aristocrat to begin with. But you will none of you get him. I had speech with him once, and I hinted — I found him *farouche*, shy, almost insulted. But I mean to have him. I shall go cautiously to work, make friends with him — and then —"

"Where did you first see him, at least tell us that?"

The artist did not answer, but lifted his glass and gazed at the electric star through the clear wine; he seemed lost in thought.

"What is the matter, Fauvel?" questioned one of them after a pause; "we are impatient to hear where you first met this coveted model; have you forgotten him?"

"I have not forgotten him," he replied; "I am pitying him. I met him first by the Arch of Titus."

The program in Margaret's hand fluttered to the floor. She realized that they were speaking of Fra Felice Estori. The tuning of the instruments behind the smilax curtain announced the approach of the second selection. The Italian refilled the glasses of his friends and raising his own gave the toast, "To the mysterious model of Meurice Fauvel."

"*Saluti*," "*Buona Festa*," "*Buon Natale*," echoed the others and their glasses clinked as the great room became again silent.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE STREET OF THE SERPENTS

He wears the rose of youth upon him.

SHAKESPEARE.

The day Margaret had left Donna Bianca's house, having learned that the young Franciscan was preparing to be a priest, she had determined to have nothing further to do with him; but when she had heard the artist speak of his unusual beauty she was filled with an uncontrollable desire to see him again; so the next morning, making some pretext to Madame for an early walk, she started out to meet him "just once more."

He had said he would wait for her at the portico of Santa Maria Maggiore, and she had come by the other door so was obliged to go through the church. Mass was being said in the Borghese Chapel.

As she passed she knelt for a moment; something seemed to tell her to turn back.

"What am I doing?" she thought, "running out deceitfully to meet a monk when I only want to see his beautiful face;" and she half rose, "ah — but I promised him I'd be here," and she sank down again.

"This is not a safe friendship," said a voice, "you know it, and he knows it."

"I am so lonely," she pleaded mentally, "and I can be careful."

"Perhaps he cannot," it whispered; "remember he is a man set apart —" Some instinct was telling her that she was treading on dangerous sands, and yet the very fact that she felt danger brought with it a sort of wild delight hitherto unknown, so she stifled the voice and rising impatiently walked the length of the vast Basilica and passed out at the Grand Portico.

## *The Street of the Serpents* 35

At first she did not see him, and it was a momentary relief. She would be almost glad should he fail to be there. Then she perceived a brown habit half hidden behind one of the columns, and her heart fluttered at the sight of it. She went towards him.

"*Buon giorno*, Signorina," he said gayly, taking her hand, "ah, this is pleasure indeed!"

Margaret felt the same magnetic thrill go through her that she had experienced when he had stolen up and knelt beside her in the Gesù.

As she looked at him he made her think of one of his own big red roses. The rich crimson had mounted to his cheeks, and his wonderful yellow-brown eyes were wide open with the happiest expression. His habit was immaculate, the cords around his waist of snowy whiteness, and the small black cap set on his head with a jaunty air.

"Come, Signorina," he hurriedly whispered, "we will go to the house of a *donnina vecchia*, she is poor but she is very good; there we may talk at our leisure. I will go first and you follow. *Andiamo*."

"Are you sure it's all right for me to go?"

"Certainly, come."

"Where does she live?"

"In the Via dei Serpenti."

Margaret had not the least idea where the Street of the Serpents might be, and a memory of the Serpent tempting Eve to sin was in her mind as she walked on for several blocks behind him. At length he turned into a narrow street with cheap little shops on either side, and suddenly disappeared in a gloomy archway. Margaret was a trifle uneasy. Yet as she had come so far she would not stop now. A little bent woman was standing in front of an open door, so wrinkled and wizened that Margaret thought she must be a hundred years old. She wore a red petticoat and green bodice, her head was tied up in a purple and white cotton handkerchief and in her ears hung

long gold hoops. She curtsied. "This way, Signorina," she said.

Coming in from the bright sunshine Margaret could scarcely tell where she was going. The woman stood aside and motioned her to enter and then she felt Estori's hand take hers and found herself in a room where the dame evidently slept and cooked and sewed and prayed, though everything was as neat as possible.

"Assunta," said Estori, raising his voice, "this is the young lady who sent you the twenty-five *lire* for Christmas."

"*Grazie tante*, Signorina," the old woman replied, curtsying again. "Fra Felice is so good, so kind. Whenever I do not have my rent he brings it to me and always he says 'the angels sent it.' I think I see one of his 'angels' now. He is *gentilissimo*, Fra Felice."

Estori turned to Margaret. "Do you not recollect, Signorina, that you gave me an offering for the poor? This *poveretta* needed help and I brought it to her." Then speaking lower, "she is deaf, so we may talk as if she were not here."

The old woman made another curtsy and pointed to two hair cloth chairs set straight back against the wall.

"I regret, Signorina," he continued, as they seated themselves, "that I have no better place to bring you. It would not look well for us to go to a hotel parlor and at Donna Bianca's we would not be alone."

"I do not mind the place," Margaret said. "I like to see different classes and how they live." She felt more at ease; the presence of the old woman was reassuring. Assunta had turned her back to them and was kneading her black bread.

"Is it against the rule of your Order for you to walk with friends in the street?" Margaret asked.

He laughed softly, taking the long rosary at his side and swinging it to and fro.

"*Is it?*" she insisted.

## *The Street of the Serpents* 37

There was a roguish twinkle in his eyes, like a naughty child's, as he replied, "It is part of the rule of my Order to be kind always to the friendless."

Margaret looked at him. Was he a young knave, this Franciscan friar, with his St. Sebastian face, or was it only ingenuousness? She concluded it was the latter.

"Would your Father Superior object to your walking with me?" she asked again.

"My Father Superior loves me well," he answered. "I am very dear to him. He is pleased with all I do." He burst into merry laughter that was music to her ears.

She continued to question: "How old are you?"

"I was twenty-two in November, on the Feast of Saint Andrea."

"Then you are four years older than I." She sighed; she felt very old, almost out of her teens, and she was beginning to learn the burden of life.

"Why are you so sad, Signorina?" he asked gently. "Won't you tell me?" No answer. "Please tell me."

The mischievous look had gone and his tone was full of earnest concern.

"I am so unhappy where I live," Margaret faltered, "but I do not want to go home to be a drag on my mother. She has to earn her own living and so must I."

Fra Felice looked puzzled. The *Signorina Americana* had no appearance of poverty with her handsome fur coat and muff, and modish hat and boots, and yet her little face had an unmistakably worried, pitiful expression.

"Senta," he began after a moment's thought, "the Nuns at the Trinita often find positions for young ladies. A friend of Donna Bianca has applied there for some lady who speaks good English to be the companion of her granddaughter. Do you know the Religious of the Sacred Heart?"

"Yes," Margaret answered eagerly, "I know an English Nun. I brought a letter to her from New York —"

"Go see her at once, Signorina," he urged. "Tell her what you have told me, and I will ask Donna Bianca to speak to the Contessa Melzi, for that is her name. In this way you could leave Casa Kotrell and still remain in Rome; and the Contessa will give you a good *stipendo*. *Ecco!* Is not this a great plan?"

Margaret's face brightened. What if she could do this! And receive a salary for her services! With Madame she was getting nothing but her board. But would her mother let her go? She had been put under the care of Mrs. Kotrell — She would cable for her mother's consent. And she talked on, growing more confidential while he helped her express herself in correct Italian. At last she remarked, "Don't you think we ought to be going, Fra Felice?"

"Do not call me that, Signorina," he began. "Leone is my baptismal name. Fra Felice is merely my monastic name. You remind me of the days in my mother's house, before I wore this," touching his habit, "when I was free, when I lived in the world as you do and besides —" he flushed as he hesitated — "I call you 'Margherita' in my prayers."

"Call me Margherita always," she said quickly; "I shall like it, Leone," and Margaret flushed also as she pronounced the name. Then she rose, thanking the old woman for her hospitality, and left first, a new-born hope in her heart so anxious was she to cut loose from her present surroundings, and feeling that same strange happiness that always attended a meeting with Fra Felice — no, Leone Estori.

And fate worked in with Margaret's desires. She had found an early opportunity to go to the Convent of the Trinità where the English nun had arranged a meeting for her with the Contessa Melzi.

The nun had vouched that Miss Randolph belonged to one of the best families in the United States, that her English was perfect, and that she was of their own faith; all of which made *a most favorable impression* upon the Contessa, who wanted

## *The Street of the Serpents* 39

me very young person to amuse her little invalid grand-daughter, and speak English to her. The child had been sent to her grandmother to be under the care of a celebrated Roman specialist for three months and the Contessa would give one hundred *lire* a month.

All that was wanting was her mother's consent. It came promptly, for Mrs. Randolph had felt secure in the guidance of the Religious of the Sacred Heart.

Margaret's only regret was parting with dear, sweet-tempered Giacinta. But Giacinta promised she would come to see her.

So the first of the year found Margaret installed in the stiff, antiquated household of the Contessa Melzi, beginning her fledgling flight for independence.

## CHAPTER V

### THE ANCIENT WINE CELLAR

Till now thy soul has been all bright and gay:  
Bid it awake and look at grief to-day.

PROCTOR.

One morning in March, Fra Felice Estori was at work among his rose bushes in the old monastery garden. It boasted of the tallest palm tree in all Rome, had a splendid view of the Colosseum, and the extraordinarily beautiful red roses with their rare perfume had lately become its great pride. The "Fra Felice" roses were the fashionable flower of the season, having first risen to fame in the home of that conservative old nobleman, Prince Estori.

Fra Felice having raked, pruned, and cut to his satisfaction, put away his tools and sat down upon a stone bench to engage in another task.

There was a real breath of spring in the air, and pansies near by had blossomed forth, big and velvety. On the bench beside him was a heavy altar missal. The book was old and dilapidated; a collector would have prized it highly. Fra Felice had found it tucked away on a dusty shelf of the brotherhood library, and it served his purpose. It was opened at about the center and on one of its pages he was placing some pansies he had just gathered. There was a yellow, a purple, and a black one. They were to be put into his next letter to the Signorina Margherita Randolph.

He had not seen her alone since she had gone to live with the Contessa Melzi. He had met her one afternoon while calling upon Donna Bianca Salviate, and occasionally while walking in the street with her little charge, when they were always attended by an elderly servant; but a correspondence had been *kept up between them* in which pressed flowers played a part.

This Italian sentiment leaves it to the flower to tell more than is prudent to put on paper.

Contrary to the rule of most religious houses, this brotherhood of Minor Franciscans usually enjoyed the privilege of receiving their mail personally.

A lay-brother was hastening down the path to where Fra Felice was seated. The latter, seeing his approach, closed the book wherein he had placed the flowers and became intent on the Latin script of another page.

"Fra Felice," said the brother, stopping in front of him, "Father Superior wishes to speak with you. He waits for you in St. Francis' hall."

"*Va bene*,"\* he answered, rising. "I will go at once, Fra Marco."

The large hall was oblong; its flooring of cement and its arched ceiling, frescoed with scenes in the life of St. Francis, reached down the walls until met by a high woodwork that formed a back for the stall seats that ran round three sides of the room. The high grated windows showed nothing but the trees and sky. Opposite the door was a daïs raised two steps above the floor and on it a massive high-backed chair, carved at the top in the shape of a cross. In this sat the Father Superior, before a table, engaged in looking over some papers and pamphlets.

When a few of young Estori's long strides brought him across the room, the Superior glanced up from a paper he was perusing. "Ah, Fra Felice," said he, "one moment." He finished reading, put the paper down and then taking up a letter, said: "Who is this, my son, that writes to you?"

Fra Felice saw it was the handwriting of Margaret Randolph, and the color left his face; the seal was as yet unbroken.

"It is a Signorina Americana, Reverend Father," he answered.

"Ah, where did you meet this lady?"

\* *Very well.*

"She is a friend of my esteemed godmother, the Donna Bianca Salviato, Reverendissimo."

The Father Superior took a paper knife from the table and inserted it under the edge of the envelope. Fra Felice's heart stood still — was he going to read the letter?

"This Signorina is very charitable," Fra Felice continued nervously, as the knife slit the paper; "she sends me alms for the poor."

The Father Superior laid down the paper-cutter and took the letter from its envelope. A whiff of violet sachet was perceptible as he did so and a shower of rose leaves fell upon the table. The color rushed back to the face of Fra Felice in a crimson flush. A curious smile played over the features of the old monk, as he gathered up the pink petals as best he could and restored them to the letter.

"Does she write you often, this Signorina Americana, eh, Felice?"

"No, no, Reverendissimo."

His heart was now beating so loudly that he felt sure the Father Superior must hear it. The Father looked at him and saw the pleading, anxious eyes fixed upon the bit of perfumed paper in his hand. Perhaps he remembered his own youth, perhaps he thought of an unsuspecting boy who had been his pupil, of an unnatural mother and a designing Marchese, for he slipped the sheet back in its envelope and held it out to him.

"Here is your letter, my son; go in peace."

"Thank you, thank you, my Father," he cried, eagerly grasping it; then, bending on one knee, he kissed the hand of the Superior and fled from the room back into the sunshine of the garden and sank down upon the stone seat beside the pansy bed.

Oh, how fortunate that the letter had not been read! He did not want any one to smile at the peculiar Italian of "*Margherita*." He understood all she tried to say, and, besides, *there might be some reference to their former meetings*. There

was no one near; he pressed it to his lips and settled down to the delight of reading it.

It told that she was well and enjoyed his letters so much. They were like sunbeams in the dark, gloomy Casa Melzi where everybody was old; the contessa, the footmen, the maids, even the dogs were gray-whiskered — every one except Enrichetta, who was only a child. But she would not be there much longer, and then perhaps they could meet again when she was free. The contessa had a friend in Naples who wanted a companion to go with her to Switzerland in the summer, and had recommended herself. If she could find something to do during May and June she might be able to stay in Europe; if not, she would have to go home. Did he know of any one who would like to take English lessons?

"You found me this position," she wrote; "perhaps you may hear of something later. I will never forget your kindness and friendship, and what it has been to me so far away from my own country; for no one cares for me here, or prays for me but you. Sometimes I feel that I must have known you in another existence, for you are not like a stranger; and when I think of you everything that is hard to bear fades away, and my spirit goes back to the Arch of Titus, and up the road between the walls, and up and up — and I see only you."

He folded the letter with a deep sigh and tucked it away out of sight. If his letters were like sunbeams to her, hers to him were like drops of pearls!

This correspondence with the American girl was the most exciting and interesting episode of his life. He would rather be dead than have it cease and now the Padre-reverendissimo\* had taken notice of it and would be on the lookout for another letter from the Signorina. He might open the next one and read it, or, worse still, not give it to him at all, and Margherita would think he did not wish to answer and never write again.

\* *Most Reverend Father.*

How could he prevent such a thing? It was very likely — it was more than likely. If only those treasured rose leaves had not fallen out, the letter itself might have been forgotten. What could be done? He knitted his black eyebrows, put his hand to his forehead, and tried to think. He could tell the Signorina to write in care of Donna Bianca and he would go for the letter; but she might not like to do this, nor Donna Bianca approve, and he must send an answer to-night. Ah, an idea! He rose quickly, went into the house, up a flight of stairs, down a corridor and out of the same door through which he had come the day he met the Signorina crying all alone at the top of the avenue of eucalyptus trees.

It was nearing the hour for the noon-day mail to arrive at the convent and Jacopo, the good-natured postman, would soon be due. He must be waylaid and instructed. Around the corner, farther down the hill, was an old chestnut tree with a small knothole in the trunk a few feet from the ground, which faced toward the convent wall and was not noticeable from the path. Any letter that came for him from Margherita he would tell Jacopo to slip into this knothole; and when a favorable opportunity presented he would go and take it out. In this way he could make sure that her letters would not be intercepted, and it would spare the Father Superior any further annoyance regarding this correspondence.

He took some coins from his pocket and counted them, fifty *centessimi*; \* that would do for Jacopo to begin with and keep him from chattering to the brothers. He walked on, well pleased with this arrangement. He would see that the hole in the tree was free, that no bird or squirrel had made a home there, and then he would wait for the postman. On turning the corner he saw to his dismay that an artist had settled himself, leaning back on his camp-stool against the very tree he had singled out for his private postoffice. He had seen this artist once before, last winter, and had spoken to him. As he ap-

\* *Ten cents.*

proached, the artist looked up from his work and nodded good day in a friendly manner.

"I have come again to finish this sketch," he said; "how have you been all this time, Fra Felice?"

Replying politely, he added: "You remember my name, I see."

"I have remembered something more. I remember your bright smile. I've been at work here for two hours," he continued, "and I've been hoping you might pass."

"Why, Signor *artista*?"

"Because you have been in my thoughts very often since that cold day last December when I stopped you at the Arch of Titus and asked you to direct me to the old monastery on the Palatine; do you remember?" Estori nodded. "And you said you belonged there yourself, and we walked up the hill together, do you remember that?"

"Yes, Signore."

"Shortly after Christmas I was called to Perugia by the death of a friend. He left me some property back in the Umbrian mountains. There was a great deal to be attended to, and I was detained there until last week. Ever been up in that part of the country?"

"No," Estori answered, a trifle impatiently.

"Well," said the artist, "I have taken the very first chance since my return to come out here and finish my sketch of this old doorway and to see you."

"To see me, Signor *artista*, and why?"

"Because I would like to paint you."

Estori moved off quickly from where he stood beside him.

"Oh, no, no," he said; "that could not be."

"Why not?"

"I could not allow it. You forget, Signore, my calling. I have many duties; also" — and he held his head proudly — "I am no artist's model."

"Of course you are not, in the ordinary sense of the term,

but you are nature's model. Do you know, Fra Felice," he continued, giving the finishing touches to his work, "that nature has been very lavish to you?"

"Nonsense!"

"Nonsense?" interrogated the artist. "Look into the first mirror in any shop window the next time you go to town."

Estori flushed. He was half embarrassed and half angry. No one had ever spoken to him so personally before. He knew that he was comely, but it had never made any impression upon him. His mother was very handsome, and it was only natural that he should resemble her. Picking up a flat stone, he sent it skipping down the hill, to relieve his irritation. The artist had risen and was holding out his hand.

"Fra Felice," he said in a pleasant voice, "do not be offended. I want to be your friend, and I should like your friendship in return; but I am very much in earnest about the picture. Will you not give me some sittings, as a favor from one friend to another?"

Estori took the offered hand. "I will think about it, Signor artista," he said. "I cannot promise."

"Well, come and see me, anyway," the artist replied cordially, "and we will not speak about the picture until you are ready. My name is Fauvel, and I live on the Vicolo San Nicola da Tolentino," and he handed him a card. Then he collected his materials and prepared to leave.

"Signor Fauvel," said Estori, "I do not wish to be ungracious; it will give me pleasure to call upon you, and I will loan you a habit for any one of your models and you will have your picture of a poor monk."

"Oh, my brother, you misunderstand. I do not want to paint a poor monk. I can get a dozen of them to sit for me. I want to paint a handsome youth," and without waiting for a reply, the artist turned and was gone.

When a few yards off he turned again, looked back at the *young figure* in the brown habit leaning against the tree, and

## *The Ancient Wine Cellar* 47,

called out: "Come in next Thursday, Fra Felice, about eleven if you can. We will have luncheon together."

Felice Estori looked at the card.

"Meurice Fauvel. The Julian Academy, Paris." And below the number of his studio in the Vicolo San Nicola da Tolentino.

As Fauvel, the artist, went down the hill, Jacopo the postman was trudging up. "How fortunate!" thought Estori; "this artist has gone just in time;" and he felt inside the hole in the tree to be sure it was all right. Yes, it was quite empty; he pulled out a few bits of bark and earth and waited. "*Hola, Jacopo!*" he called, as the postman drew near; "how is your good father to-day? If he feels strong enough to talk I will run in and see him this afternoon."

"He is a little better, Fra Felice, thanks to you for the fresh eggs and the wine, and he will be happy to see the reverendo. He says Fra Felice's smile makes glad his old heart."

"*Povero!* I will surely come. Is there any mail for me, Jacopo?"

The postman looked over the packet of letters in his hand.

"Nothing, *Frate,*" he said; "but by the early morning mail there was a letter."

"Yes, yes, I have it," said Estori; "this is it," and he took out the letter of Margaret Randolph. "Listen, Jacopo," and he drew the man towards him under the tree, "whenever you have a letter for me like this, in this handwriting, do not deliver it up there," pointing to the convent; then, casting a look up and down the path to make sure no one was in sight, "but slip it in here," and he showed him the knothole in the tree. "Provided, of course, there may be no one around watching you. *Capite?*\* I have reasons, Jacopo, good reasons, for wishing you to do this, you understand; you will not forget?"

"Be tranquil, reverendo, *certamente* I will not forget. All

\*Do you understand?

mail in this foreign-looking hand for Fra Felice Estori to be put in here, and all other mail to be handed in at the door."

"*Ecco!* That is right," and giving him the fifty *centessimi*, he added, "and fifty more for every letter I take out of the tree."

Jacopo, profuse in his promises of fidelity, left Fra Felice leaning against his chestnut tree lost in thought as to how he could help this cherished friend, this little lonely American. When he heard the great bell sound the dinner hour he sauntered back to the house and into the refectory with the others of the Community.

It being Lent, they refrained from conversation during the midday meal. At the end of the room stood a raised pulpit large enough to hold a chair and reading desk; a door opened in the wall behind it, and a monk stepped forth, seated himself, and began to read aloud. It was a spiritual exercise from the pen of some saint of the Order and the subject dealt upon the importance of crushing out all earthly affection in the ascetic life. Fra Felice heard very little of it, for he was mentally composing a beautiful letter to Margherita to be committed to paper so soon as his duties for the day should be over.

After dinner, and the office for the hour being said, he went into town to visit the sick father of Jacopo. Coming down the Via Nazionale, he caught sight of himself in a mirror and recalling the words of the artist, stopped and looked at his reflection.

A street band was playing a gay waltz. He had danced well as a boy. He would like to dance now, he thought, with the Signorina Margherita for a partner. She was so slight and graceful, he was sure she must be a good dancer. He remembered the dances given at his home where all was elegance and refinement, in his father's house, *his* house! And his mother! A pang shot through his heart at the thought of her; how he should love to see her again! Passing a *café*, he noticed a young couple at one of the tables outside; they were laughing and chat-

ting. How pleasant to be free to mingle in the amusements of the world, with a companion of one's choice, and not have to think that one must needs be indoors for this office or that; and he turned regretfully off the gay thoroughfare and hastened back to his convent home on the Palatine.

Supper over he was called into the library by one of the older fathers whose eyesight was growing dim, to help search on the map for a town in South America that he wished to locate. The library was the pleasantest room in that cold, barren monastery. Huge oil lamps hanging by iron chains from the ceiling burned brightly, casting a ruddy glow upon the brick floor. The shelves were laden with interesting volumes by ancient and modern writers on religion, art, history, science, astronomy, and the classics in every language. Spaces that were not taken up by books were covered with maps and charts. There were some rare old illuminated missals on tables, under glass, specimens of ancient scriptural writings by the early Fathers of the church, and standing in a corner a large globe of the world so battered by long years of service that it was hard to distinguish one country from another. Fra Felice turned from the map to the globe and revolved it rather impatiently, searching for the place desired by the old monk.

"I cannot find it, Padre," he said; "I think the town is not of enough importance to be marked."

"Not so, my son; it is a post-office town and it must be there. Bring out an atlas and look for Brazil, and I think your bright young eyes will be able to find it."

Estori obeyed. "More delay," he said to himself; it was now only twenty minutes to compline, then to bed; and he had something very particular to do.

"*Ecco!* Here it is, my Father," he said at length, keeping one eye on the clock and one on the map; "is there anything else, Reverendo?"

"No, that is all, thank you, son," replied the old man, and Estori hurried away.

To accomplish what he had in mind before the bell rang it was necessary to take a short cut through the rambling buildings; this led him past the kitchen where the lay brothers were preparing bread to be baked in the morning and to the cellar door. Some of them wondered where the young brother should be going, but he had been brought up among them and was allowed the freedom of the house, having many privileges on account of his high-born station, they supposed, and of the pious nobleman with whom he was connected. Closing the door after him, Estori ran down the stairs and crossing the cellar where were kept numerous wine vats, he descended another stair to a sub-cellar or series of vaults. Holding a candle high above his head, so that it might throw the light on the rough earthen floor, he passed through several openings until he came to a heap of rubbish against a wall. Here he set his candle down and began to clear away some odds and ends of boards, bricks and broken pottery.

In times gone by this sub-cellar had been used for the cooling of wine in the amphora, or pottery vases made by the old Romans and sunk into the earth, and the unevenness of the ground was caused by the falling in of the circular pits dug for the storing of the wine. As he worked he thought of the first time he had cleared away this pile. It was quite five years ago, on a day when the convent had been honored by a visit from a great Cardinal. The Father Superior, wishing to give the Cardinal of the best the house could supply, had sent Fra Luigi, the steward, to fetch a bottle of the choicest wine. Fra Luigi kept this particular wine lying on the floor in this underground chamber, for nowhere else could it get so cool. Fra Luigi was old and rheumatic, and the boy Estori had marked his painful hobbling and in the kindness of his young heart had insisted upon doing the serving brother's errand for him. That same day the Marchese Pallavicino had visited him and given him *a 100 lire* gold piece; it was a present from his mother, who *could not come herself*. How rich he had felt as he had run

down the steps two at a time to bring up the wine for poor old Luigi. He had held the gold coin in his hand as he went.

He had never been down there before, but with Luigi's directions penetrated into the third opening which was lower than the rest and therefore cooler; he had had no trouble in finding the wine, and taking up a bottle was about to return when the 100 *lire* piece slipped from his hand and rolled away out of sight, underneath the pile of rubbish. He knew he could not take the time to search for it then, the Cardinal's supper must not be kept waiting, but as soon as he had given the wine to Luigi and watched him hobble off, he had returned to the spot to search for the precious coin. He had been obliged to clear away the entire débris before finding it, and then he saw that the nucleus of the pile had been formed by a few bricks falling out of place in the wall near the floor. They were so old they had almost disintegrated and some good lazy brother, long since gone to rest, rather than trouble to replace them had thrown some boards and other junk at hand over the opening, and thereby lost the chance of making an archaeological discovery.

But young Estori after securing his gold piece had examined the hole, and saw that the wall at this point had been made to test out some ancient Roman brickwork. He thrust Luigi's lamp inside and discovered a circular chamber several feet below the opening, with marble steps leading down into it. Full of boyish curiosity he had tugged at the loose bricks until the opening was large enough to crawl through; then he descended, taking the lamp with him. A few glances showed that he had stumbled upon a relic of Imperial Pagan Rome! He knew his mythology well, and there were pagan frescoes, bacchantes, nymphs and satyrs, sporting upon the crumbling walls. The ceiling was dome-shaped, upheld by slender columns of Numidian marble. The atmosphere was warm and dry. Far up above, the grass and flowers and vines were

growing and perhaps at that moment one of his companions was saying his beads while walking up and down a garden path overhead.

The medieval monastery was built upon the site of Nero's Golden House. He was standing in an undiscovered portion of Cæsar's palace! His first impulse had been to run and tell the Fathers of his wonderful find, but upon second thought he decided to keep it a secret. He had no real place of his own and here he would be free to do as he chose. He would fit it up with a chair and a lamp and come here to read the wild stories of adventure that were for sale on the news-stands, which he dared not read openly. Also he would bring a few private treasures that he had hitherto kept sewed up in his mattress; here he could look at them and enjoy them. Yes, this would be his own personal sanctum and no one should know of it.

Ever since, for five years, this hidden chamber had been his alone and no member of the community so much as suspected its existence. Old Fra Luigi had died that summer, and the brother who succeeded him as steward found a more accessible storeroom in other cellars for the cooling of wine, and so Estori was the only one who ever came here. And now, kicking away the last boards, he entered and swept the candle around the space wherein he stood, its light warming into life the rich colored marble of the floor. What would not the archæologists give to see that flooring, set in regular design with lapis lazuli, jade, porphyry and jasper. A fortune was in each block of marble! Crossing the chamber he dropped on the ground before a cracked disc of lapis lazuli. He set his candle down beside him and removed the stone.

At the time of his first visit he had discovered a small statue of Eros on the floor; it lay in front of the niche from which it had fallen; one little wing broken off at the shoulder was beside it; the other, broken also, had disappeared. He had *raised it in his strong young arms*, and set it back in place and

it had watched him come and go and he had talked to it as to a familiar friend. Underneath the slab of lapis lazuli was a space of about six inches and inside a red woolen cloth which he unfolded. It contained a package of letters, some loose manuscripts, in a round boyish hand, a few sensational novels, a woman's glove, a gold locket and chain, and a small ring of dingy beaten metal.

From his pocket he took Margaret Randolph's last letter and laid it upon the others; the ring he slipped on and off his finger and put it down again. This ring he had found wedged in the crack of the disc he had just removed, and had extracted it from its lodging with his pen-knife. The small gray glove he pressed to his lips. What made him feel suddenly unhappy? Was it the touch of that glove so essentially feminine — he had nothing feminine in his life — was it a longing for Margherita, or his mother? He dropped the glove, caught up the locket and opened it. A sweet, girlish face smiled at him. She had clustering curls, black as his own, laughing eyes and a beautiful mouth. "How much she looks like me," he thought. This miniature of his mother had been painted when he was three years old and he had worn it around his neck with a little gold Madonna attached to the same chain, until the day when he put on the monk's habit. "Mamma," he whispered, "how happy I would be to see you!" And he had become "*Frate*" without even asking her consent.

True his step-father had assured him that if he wished to follow in the footsteps of the holy St. Francis, his mother would never stand in his light. She had other children now, small brothers and sisters whom he had never seen. Did she think of him every day, he wondered, Leone her first child? He gazed lovingly at the likeness, trying to find an answer in the laughing eyes.

And the little wingless Love looked down upon him from the niche in the wall, with an innocent smile frozen on its baby face of *everlasting* marble. With a start his reverie

came to an end; he must return immediately, or he would be late for compline; no sound of the bell could penetrate into these depths.

He held the miniature one second against his breast, kissed it fondly and laid it back among the collection, carefully folding the red cloth over all; he restored the disc to the floor and snatching up the candle rose to leave.

"Good night, Amore," he said, addressing the statue; "soon I will visit thee again; thou hast guarded well my treasures all these years; watch ever," and mounting the steps, he hastily crawled through the opening and hurrying on was just in time to take his place in the line of brown-robed brethren that was filing into the chapel for the last office.

## CHAPTER VI

### LEARNING NEW ETHICS

"Child of the Infinite One,  
Born to eternal day,  
Made in the image of God,  
To traverse the Heavenly way;  
As a fountain that never fails  
Thy spirit and life are free  
And all that belongs to God  
Rightly belongs to thee."

Meurice Fauvel was forty years old, a man of strong likes and dislikes, and a generous heart; loyal to a degree in his friendships, agnostic in his views. He had the greatest faith in his own sex and a light opinion of women. He believed in the love of few of them, in the virtue of none. He went on the theory that every woman had her price. It was either ambition, position, money or love. For the women whose price was love, he had profound respect. In his youth he had been deceived by a woman he deeply loved and he had vowed then that no other should ever make him suffer again.

His friendships were his greatest pleasure. He was thoroughly artistic, and an intense lover of beauty. The young monk of the Palatine, with his classical features, his exceptional coloring, his graceful carriage and soft movements, with such strength of limb and glow of health, was without doubt the most beautiful creature he had ever beheld. One moment he seemed like a superb young panther unconscious of his power, the next "made in the image and likeness of God."

As Fauvel sat in his studio this spring morning, he was comparing Estori to the work he had in hand;—a portrait of the only son and heir of a French nobleman, a small, sickly youth with sharp, pinched features and a discontented expression.

The youth he had in his mind, and the youth before him on the canvas were in marked contrast.

He was a faithful worker and his portraits had excited attention, and he felt that he might indeed become famous could he only persuade Estori to sit for him. More than this he was interested in him personally. Estori was unusual and original and Fauvel was curious to know how it had come to pass that anyone so richly endowed by nature had stepped out of life's race where he could so easily win his laurels, to shut himself in the cloister. He put down his brush, tipped back his chair and lost himself in thought. He enjoyed the study of character and the young Franciscan was a problem. He was aroused by a knock at the door. "*Avanti*," he answered, and the door opened upon the subject of his thoughts.

"Fra Felice," he exclaimed, rising and holding out his hand in a most cordial welcome, "I am delighted to see you. I've been hoping you would come; how are you?"

Estori answered his questions courteously and glanced around. The room was good-sized with a skylight and a large window facing north that opened on a court. There were finished and unfinished paintings and sketches about; in one corner was a plaster-cast of the Capitoline Venus, in another a bust of Augustus.

"A crude sort of place I have here," Fauvel said, "more of a work-shop than anything else; you should see my real studio in Brussels. I am a Belgian and Brussels is my home. I am only a student, so to speak, in Rome, though this is my fourth season here. Take this arm-chair and if you will allow me I'll go on with my work while we talk. This young gentleman," pointing to the portrait, "I am expecting for his last sitting this afternoon and I want to be ready for him."

"Continue by all means," said Estori, "I like to watch you. How pleasant it must be to have some work like this, that one can do little by little and afterwards say to oneself — '*I have made that.*'"

"It is," said Fauvel, "there is nothing like pleasant, congenial work that one can see grow, as you say. To study it out in all its details, to improve and progress, to master its difficulties and to feel within oneself the power of creating; to create, that is the joy of an artist's life. Have you any special work that you are interested in?" asked Fauvel, touching up the sandy hair of the French youth.

"Nothing in particular."

"That's a pity. I did not know but what there was some one thing you young Franciscans were engaged in."

"No," he replied, "we keep the Rule and we make visits."

"Humph," said Fauvel, "would you mind telling me how you pass the day? I should like very much to know."

Felice Estori laughed softly. "There is not much to tell, Signor *artista*," he said. "I rise at four o'clock in the morning and hear Mass; when it is over I go into the garden and watch the sun rise and water my rose-bushes, unless there is a heavy dew; then comes the morning meal and afterwards my studies with the Fathers. I am to be ordained priest as soon as I am twenty-four," he added with sudden dignity.

"Indeed."

"Then I have work for a while. Afterwards I come into the city and make visits and if it is summer I catch butterflies. I have a pretty collection under glass in our museum."

"You stick pins in them and let them flutter to death, I suppose," said Fauvel, a little dryly.

"Oh no, no! That would be cruel," he answered; "I put camphor on their heads and they die immediately."

"What else?"

"Oh, there are the daily offices you know, matins, lauds, tierce, sext, mones, vespers and compline."

"Yes, yes, I understand that, but you yourself?"

"I have several poor people I look after and again when I am free in the afternoons I take walks with my companions. I can walk from Rome to Frascati," he said proudly.

"I don't doubt it," said Fauvel, glancing at the splendidly proportioned figure, "and in bad weather, what then? I am not asking out of curiosity, but interest, you understand."

"Oh, at such times if I am not needed by some of the older Fathers whose eyesight is poor, to read or write for them, I compose poetry, I practice a little on my violin and I think and think — about things."

"I imagine we both do a good deal of thinking, Fra Felice. I was thinking of you when you came in and I am thinking now that the life you describe would kill me. But tell me about the poetry; I should like to read some of your verses, may I?"

The young monk hesitated. "Do let me see them," continued Fauvel; "have you had any published?"

"No," he answered, "I do not know how to arrange for it."

"I do, though. I began work as a sketch-artist on a French magazine and I have friends in the literary world; I might get them published for you."

Estori flushed. "I — I would not like it to be known that I had written them," he said, "for you see it is not a religious poetry and it might cause comment."

"There is no occasion for it to be known; you can have a '*nom de plume*.' Just initials if you like of your Christian name."

"It is Leone."

"That is good, 'Leone.' You remind me sometimes of a young lion. 'Leone' suits you exactly. Bring me your verses and I will see what I can do."

"Thank you, thanks Signore. When shall I bring them?"

This was just the opening Fauvel wanted. He had determined not to mention the sitting the first time Estori called. He would make friends with him, gradually gain his confidence and the rest would come. He put down his brush, sat back in his chair and folded his arms. "Let me see, to-day is *Thursday*; can you come on Sunday, Fra Felice?"

"Yes, I can. And, Signor Artista," he added, "there is something I came to speak to you about to-day. A friend of mine would like to find some pupils in English. Is there any one you know of who would be likely to take lessons?"

"I cannot say I know of any one at present, but I will keep it in mind."

"I shall esteem it greatly if you will remember," Estori said, rising, "and now I must go."

"Oh, no," said Fauvel, "I invited you to have luncheon with me."

"I may not stop this morning, thank you, Signore. Some other time it will give me much pleasure to accept. I am busy to-day," and in five minutes he was gone.

"Busy," said Fauvel to himself, as he closed the door after him. "Busy with the poetry, the butterflies and the roses and an occasional 'Ave' and 'Pater Noster' thrown in. *Mon Dieu!* What a life for a boy like that."

When Fra Felice was returning from his visit to Fauvel, he saw an equipage with a familiar livery, in front of the Convent door and as he drew near he recognized the coat of arms of the family of Estori. The brother porter was standing in the doorway talking with a footman. "*Eccola!*" he said, pointing to the approaching monk, and the servant stepped forward and bowing low handed him a note. Opening it he read:

Fra Felice Estori

*Dearest Cousin:*

My beloved father has been ill for three days, but only this morning have the doctors become anxious. I beg that you will hasten to us, as he has asked to see you. In mercy pray for his recovery, or that he may be given the grace of a peaceful death.

Your affectionate cousin,

DANIELE FILIPO ESTORIN.

It was his father's cousin, the old Prince, who was ill. These cousins had paid him little or no attention since his boyhood, but *they were in trouble* and had sent for him, so

bidding the messenger wait he obtained from his Superior the necessary leave of absence and was driven away. Three days passed. The old man was hovering between life and death, but on the third which was Sunday he rallied and the doctors said he might live for weeks; so Fra Felice went back to report to the Convent and ask permission to remain a few days longer with his relatives. It was readily granted, for the old Prince and his son were staunch members of the Black Party and Daniele had sent by his young kinsman a large sum of money, to be given in alms to the poor, and asking for the prayers of the community.

While Fra Felice was in his cell repacking a small valise, he remembered his engagement with the artist. He had never expected to have his verses published, he had written them for his own amusement and the idea of actually seeing them in print dazzled him. It was too great a chance to let slip. He would have time to make his visit to Fauvel before going to his anxious cousins; so collecting the manuscripts, he threw them into the valise and set out.

Fauvel received Estori in what was called his "lounge." Oriental rugs were upon the floor and expensive draperies hung at the windows. There was a great, comfortable leather couch with many pillows, and upholstered chairs stood invitingly around. He had shelves full of books in French, German and Italian. On the center table which held an assortment of smoking paraphernalia was a bronze lamp with an amber shade. Photographs of singers, actresses and dancers were scattered about the room, also a few studies in the nude and semi-nude and a series of pen-and-ink sketches of the Castle Saint Angelo, the Pantheon, the Vatican Gardens and other monuments of Rome. There was a wonderfully carved cabinet full of choice glass and silverware and near it a tapestry screen which stood before a door opening into the bedroom. But the most prominent object was a big, brilliant macaw, perched on a high *ornate stand*.

Fauvel was seated in an easy chair, smoking a Turkish cigarette, with the manuscripts on a tabourette beside him, while his guest crouched upon the sofa, elbows on knees and chin resting in his hands, eagerly, yet nervously watching the varying expression on the face of Fauvel as he read. These verses were the thoughts and working of his innermost heart and mind and to uncover them thus in cold blood to a comparative stranger had been no easy matter.

"If I had written these poems I would not be at all ashamed to sign them." That was Fauvel's first deliverance. "Yes," he repeated, "I should sign my name to them with great pride."

"That is true, Signor Artista — true?"

"True, every word of it," was the reply. "This one on 'Springtime' is a gem, and *this*, 'The Song of the Shepherd,' exquisite. There is a symmetry, a rhythm to the lines that is music. And the one you call 'Lonely Rose,' shows a depth of feeling I should have said you were too young to understand."

Estori colored. "I am in my twenty-third year," he said.

"A mere infant," answered Fauvel, smiling kindly. "And these others," taking up a sheet he had laid down, "are fair and promising. You are writing somewhat over your head in the sonnet called 'Shadow'; when you are ten years older try it again. But let me have these, 'The Song of the Shepherd,' 'The Lonely Rose' and 'Spring-time!' I have no doubt I can get them accepted for you and paid for as well. There is a periodical published in Florence that wants just this sort of thing and the editor is a friend of mine."

"Oh, Signor Fauvel, I shall be so grateful!" Estori sprang from his seat and stood in front of him; "but you understand I do not put my name to them. If they were religious poetry —"

"Why, man," exclaimed Fauvel cutting him short, "you don't know what you are talking about! They are teeming

with religion, the best, the most wholesome and the most intelligent spirit of religion in the world! Your verses ring with the love of God for man and with the gratitude in the human heart for the gifts of life, and hope and the power of enjoyment of all His great works. Your 'Springtime' is the joyous response of the creature to the Creator; I'd like to know what more beautiful religion there is than that? You churchmen," he added scornfully, "think there can be no religion without dogma."

Fra Felice was silent for a moment; then he said, "They might be called religious, I suppose, if one looked at them in that light. For myself I never thought so; I only wrote what I felt and no one but you, Signore, has even seen them."

"Well, I intend that many shall see them," Fauvel said, gathering up the papers, selecting the ones he wanted and handing the remainder to Estori. "This is the sort of religion the world has need of. Love, sincere, pure unselfish love for God and man, beast and bird. Your verses are worth a dozen sermons preached from a pulpit in a dismal old church. Pshaw!" he continued, knocking the ashes from his cigarette, "I care nothing for creeds. I do not know where I came from and I do not know where I am to go; I only know that I am here. The Earth exists, that I know too; it's none of my business why; I would be wasting time if I tried to solve the problem. I am only an atom tossed for a brief space upon its surface; but I am an important atom, a portion of a puzzle, as it were, that cannot be fitted together without me; therefore I am of use and it is my use to help brighten. It is within my power to add to the joy or sorrow of the other portions of the Great Puzzle that come near me."

Fauvel took three long puffs of his cigarette and sent rings of smoke circling about his head.

"This is a truth to my mind that shines out plainly. Now I believe," he went on, "the trouble with all of us is that we *are lacking in conceit*; we do not realize our own importance.

Of course it is. Let us stop wondering why we were born, stop looking out for flaws and faults and errors and cease our religious controversies. Instead, let us in our humility as atoms acknowledge that we know nothing of the why and wherefore of the Creator, but let us rise up in the pride of our manhood and each one say, 'I am part of His almighty Scheme; no matter how full the world is, it has need of me or I would not be in it. I was sent to strengthen His plan, and I believe that plan is love.' "

Estori's eyes had grown larger and larger as he listened. He had never heard an argument of this kind before.

"Then, Signore," he said, "there is no fear of God in your great plan — only love?"

"If all were love, there would be no place for fear."

"Fear of sin?"

"What do you call sin?"

"What one's conscience tells him is wrong."

"Conscience is a matter of education, just as morality is a matter of geography. If I were a Hindoo or a Turk I could have three wives, or four, or as big a harem as I could support. Being a European I can have but one. I am even told that among some tribes of Esquimaux a man may exchange wives with his neighbor. A question of the map, that is all."

"But Christian morals are the same throughout the world, regardless of race or color," Estori said. "Wherever our missionaries go preaching the teachings of Christ, there exist or should exist Christian morals."

"You are wise to amend your statement," Fauvel answered ironically, "but let us not have a moral discussion at present; there are more interesting topics. I see in your verses the natural religion of your heart. I read more of it between the lines. You, Fra Felice, might win spurs in the literary field if you did not wear that habit."

"What is the matter with my habit? It is an ancient and honorable dress."

"Oh, there's nothing the matter with the habit, it is picturesque and medieval and drapery suits your style; the trouble is with you."

Estori threw back his head and said a little haughtily, "I have never disgraced it."

"No, no, I do not mean that, but it cramps your capabilities. It makes you narrow and stilted. You are even afraid to sign your name to those beautiful verses. You might become a great poet if you were free to come boldly into the world, to taste of its joys and sorrows, to learn its temptations and pit-falls, to sift the good from the evil; then there would be a marked difference in your writings. So far you have only theories and ideas, charming and poetical, still they are only fancies. What you need is experience to make your works live, personal experience, the greatest teacher. But I do not see how you are going to get it as long as you wear the habit. How did you ever come to put it on?"

Estori did not answer for a moment; there was a far-away look in his strange eyes; then he said slowly, "It is a mystery."

"I should think it was!" said Fauvel. "How a youth of your attractions and tastes could ever have chosen monastic life is beyond my comprehension."

"I do not know that I did choose it. I grew up with the idea of it. I was sent as a private pupil to a Franciscan priest. My mother and step-father are very devout people. I think they always expected I would become a monk."

"Ah," said Fauvel, "I understand better now. So you walked into the trap?"

"What do you mean?"

"I will tell you sometime. Our parents often think they can arrange a satisfactory career for us and as often they are mistaken. Your experience has been a little like my own."

"Were you selected for the priesthood?"

"*Ma foi*, no! My parents wished me to become a physician. My father was one of the most prominent physicians in Brussels and it was natural to suppose that his only son should follow his profession. The idea was instilled into me from boyhood; in fact I doubt if my parents even gave a thought but that it would be my own choice."

"And you did not care for it?"

"No, I loved art. I made pictures as early as my nursery days and at school when I had won the first prize for drawing, I was allowed to take private lessons of a professor. He took much interest in my work and I used to go about with him visiting among artists in their studios, which was my great amusement. Then came the time for me to enter the Medical College, which I did reluctantly."

Fauvel threw away his cigarette, and stretched out in his chair and continued:—"During those years, as you may know, my heart was not in my studies and many a day when I was in the dissecting-room with the subject before me I have wished instead that I were a student in the life class at the Sorbonne. But I persevered for my father's sake and received my diploma. I practiced with him for five years, but I knew I would never amount to anything in that profession. I could be a careful, conscientious physician, but no more. About that time I had some trouble, a love affair. I was young and it struck hard. Then I knew I must make a break if I were ever to rise from the staggering effect of that blow. My life was my own and not my father's and I longed for my old, congenial, interesting work that would absorb all other thoughts."

Fauvel paused. The macaw that had been quiet and sleepy most of the afternoon now began to flap its wings and make harsh sounds.

"Come, Fleurette, come," said Fauvel, addressing the bird in French, "come *chérie*," and the brilliant creature fluttered across the room and perched on its master's arm.

"And what did your father say, Signore, was he angry?"

“ He was hurt, not angry, and greatly disappointed. I went at once to Paris and entered the Julian Academy and have never regretted the step. Oh, I find my former profession very useful at times.” He smiled and stroked the bird’s plume as he talked. “ My thorough knowledge of anatomy, for instance, when I do figures, for which I care most of all. Again this winter when I was at my old fortress in the mountains there was a bad gun-shot accident to a peasant; there were no doctors for miles around. I dressed his wounds and watched him for several days. While I was in attendance his wife was confined and I delivered her of twins. Among the *contadini* I soon had a long list of patients. They called ‘ Signor Dottore ’ up there.”

“ Then you have two professions,” said Estori. “ I shall have to say ‘ *Professore-Dottore-Artista* ’ after this.”

“ Call me Fauvel, Meurice, what you like. I have brought you this to show you that a man may change his career and be happy and successful, even against the wishes of his family. You can do likewise.”

Estori dropped his lounging position and straightened himself. “ With me it is different,” he said. “ I have taken vows.”

“ You are only twenty-two years old; I consider it was height of cruelty to have made you take vows, even though you are a priest.”

“ I have not complained,” he said rising. “ I think I am anti-clerical, Signor Fauvel, and in that case I cannot change you again.”

“ Not a bit of it. Sit down, my dear fellow. I have good friends among the clergy. I have an uncle a Bishop. I was born in the faith the same as yourself, only I have advanced in thought. Holy Orders are well and good for some men if they choose to go into them when they are old enough to weigh the matter, but not for you — you are making a mistake.”

Estori was still standing and had taken up his old-fashioned valise.

"The circumstances, Signore," he said firmly,—and his eyes met those of the artist in a resolute gaze,—“are not the same. You were free to begin with; you had only to consider your duty to your father. I have to consider my duty to God.”

It might have been the young Archangel Michael, who stood there so rigidly in all his dignity. The coarse habit was unnoticed, for the splendid juvenile form seemed invested with a majesty of its own, and Fauvel wondered if there were any look in the world so hard as that of upright youth, with its terrible unconscious directness; the look of youth that sees only in the present, too confident to doubt or fear, youth so encased in an undented coat of mail that it has no realization of either virtue or sin.

Fauvel set the bird on the arm of the chair and rose, and placing his hands on the shoulders of Estori looked him in the eyes.

*“Amico mio,”* \* he said, “have you ever considered the duty of God to you?”

“I do not understand.”

“The Being you call God sent you into the world. You are here through no will of your own. He has endowed you with rare gifts, unusual physical beauty first of all, you must know that? God is your Heavenly Father, you say; you are His child, He wishes you to be happy. The happiness of his children is the wish of every true father. Now I have thought from the moment I saw you that you were wearing that habit from no choice of your own, merely from environment and the influence of other minds working upon yours. Nor do I believe that God would be offended at your casting it off, if it would make you happier to do so.”

“I must go now,” Estori said, breaking from him.

\*My friend.

"Stop a bit — what name goes with the verses, 'Leone?'"

"As you choose, Signore."

"And about the English lessons? I think I have two pupils for your friend."

"That is very kind," Estori said gratefully, and held out his hand.

"Come in the middle of the week," Fauvel continued, "and then I'll let you know definitely; I will send off a letter to the editor in Florence to-night."

"Thank you, Signore."

When he was gone, Fauvel lighted another cigarette and went into the adjoining room to dress for an engagement at the Grand Hotel, while Estori sauntered through the Piazza Barberini and down the Via Tritone, with those words in his ears, "Have you ever thought of the duty of God to you? You are His child, and He wishes you to be happy."

As he crossed the Piazza Colonna something the old Prince had said to him that first day he had been summoned to his bedside, now recurred to his mind. "I fear a great injustice has been done you, my dear young cousin," he had whispered; "God grant that what is may be for the best. You were a fatherless boy and it was my duty to have seen more after your interests. Can you forgive an old man's neglect?" And he had assured him he knew of nothing to forgive, but should there have been anything he had his forgiveness willingly.

Approaching the Palazzo Estori he heard a bell tolling, and passing through the arched entrance he was surprised to find no *portiere* at his post. Crossing the old moss-grown courtyard, he ascended a flight of marble stairs to the first landing. The great door was ajar, he pushed it open and entered the antechamber emblazoned with the shield and coat of arms of the Estoris. No footman was in his customary place. He walked through room after room, all deserted, until he came to a corridor that led to the apartments of the Prince. There *he found a group of servants weeping.*

"Hasten, hasten, Don Felice," said the old butler, "or you will be too late. His Excellency, my dear master, became suddenly worse at noon; he has received the last sacrament; he is dying."

Estori lifted the rich velvet curtain and stepped into the room. The old man was the color of yellow ivory, and was breathing feebly and at long intervals. Daniele Estori was sobbing aloud as he knelt with his wife close beside the bed, while a great Cardinal, his father's life-long friend, was repeating the prayers for a departing soul. Fra Felice crossed to the bedside and knelt with his cousins. As he did so the breathing ceased. The Cardinal raised his hand and said,

"Go forth, Christian soul, from this world, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost."

## CHAPTER VII

### THE WEAVING OF THE FATES

"—I never lived till now.  
I have no past where thou art not,  
My only life art thou."

"How good it is to see you again, *cara Signorina!*"

Giacinta, the maid who had been kind to Margaret in her first days in Rome, was come to see the little American lady.

"It is equally good to see you, dear Giacinta," said Margaret. "Sit down in that big chair and be quite comfortable," and she gently pushed Giacinta into the only available chair and seated herself upon the bed. She had found a small room in the Pension Luella which had been recommended by the Contessa Melzi where a young woman might board alone with propriety. Margaret's trunks took up most of the space and the other chair was filled with articles of the expensive *trousseau* provided by Cousin Cornelia Ward. "I came here yesterday," she continued, "and am in the act of unpacking. Little Enrichetta Melzi has gone home to her parents and the contessa has nothing further for me to do; but I have hopes of another position as companion to a friend of hers who is going to Switzerland for the summer. In the meantime I have two months to fill in. The nuns at the Trinita have found me an engagement to read aloud to a blind lady, and I think I can manage to get some pupils for English lessons."

"But Signorina, you are too young and pretty to go about alone."

"Giacinta, you must understand that American girls are not like Italians. We are much more independent. Now tell me about Madame, and the young ladies, and yourself."

"La Kotrell and the Signorine," Giacinta answered, "left the city the first of April, and I am living with my brother

who has a book-shop outside the Porta Pia. I don't care to take a situation just yet, but I will do any work for you, Signorina. Let me take your linen; I can have it washed much cheaper than you can. I will mend it and run in the ribbons. You shall see."

"Oh, that will be a delightful arrangement," said Margaret, "and you will come every week and we can have nice talks."

When Giacinta had departed Margaret took a note from her bureau drawer and reread it.

*Dearest Signorina:*

With what joy I have received the news that you are once more free. Can you meet me to-morrow morning at the house of old Assunta? If you answer at once I will receive your note this evening. Do not disappoint me. I am all impatience to see you.

Yours,

LEONE.

The resolution she had made before Christmas not to see Fra Felice again had entirely vanished. How could she be blamed for clinging to the only friend she had? The contessa had been pleasant but patronizing, had made her feel that she was not an equal, since she was in employment, Margaret supposed, and she had suffered in consequence. And when she saw how some of the titled people ran after rich Americans whom her Cousin Cornelia would not have inside her doors, that also made bitterness in her heart. Fra Felice was the only real true friend she had, and she could not, she could not under the circumstances, be expected to give him up. Besides, every one else she knew was old, and he was young — young like herself.

It was almost in a defiant spirit that she found her way the next morning to old Assunta's, and felt again his strong hand-clasp, and was looking into his beautiful face.

Assunta was in a corner of her room kneading black bread, and after her first respectful greetings turned her back and paid no more attention to them.

Estori asked Margaret questions concerning her plans. Her mother was willing she should stay in Italy, she told him, if she could take care of herself, and felt relief in knowing that the Nuns were watching over her. She had never taught any one, but she was sure she could, and so on, conversing quite fluently; and he was surprised to find her Italian so much improved.

Then he spoke of her letters and what a pleasure they had been to him.

"Are you sure it is safe for me to write you freely?" she asked.

"Perfectly," he answered, and explained how her letters were dropped into the chestnut tree by Jacopo, the postman.

"Isn't that deceiving your Superior?"

"I have never been forbidden to receive your letters," he laughed softly.

He was the strangest creature and the most interesting she had ever known. Evidently he did not see the slightest harm in establishing a private post-office and outwitting his Superior. To her mind deceit was deceit. She might deceive but she would recognize the wrong. His conscience apparently was perfectly clear. He seemed to know she was not satisfied, for he said: "There is no harm in your letters, Signorina, they are beautiful and good and they make me very happy. I am very dear to the Father Superior and he is glad when I am happy. If I were receiving wicked letters, from a wicked person, that would be different. Be tranquil, it is all right."

Assunta finished her bread, dried her hands, said something to Estori in rapid Italian which Margaret could not understand and left the room, closing the door after her. "She has gone to the shop for a moment," he explained.

"I must go," said Margaret, consulting her watch.

"No, no," he said, "we have not as yet planned for to-morrow."

"To-morrow?"

"Yes, I must see you every day, Signorina."

"Oh, that is impossible," she said quickly.

He took her hand. "Margherita," he said, "I must see you every day. No, do not shake your head; do you know," and his voice became lower and softer, "I think of you all day, I dream of you by night. I wonder how I ever lived before I knew you; the day I met you seems to be the day that I was born."

"Don't," she said, in a frightened tone trying to draw away her hand, "you must not talk like this; please don't."

But he held it tightly. "Margherita, I must see you every day. If you will not meet me then I shall stand near your house and watch you come out." His strange eyes glowed like topaz, and his face was so near to hers that she could feel his warm breath on her cheek.

"Oh, you must not say such things, you must not." She whispered in alarm. But before she left Estori had extracted a promise from her to meet him at Donna Bianca's the following afternoon, and she had yielded.

After she had gone Estori went to call upon the artist whom he found at his breakfast. Fauvel gave him a most cordial welcome and made him sit down at the table.

"I am very well satisfied with myself," Fauvel said, "I have sold three pictures. I hope you feel in as good a humor as I do, but I don't believe you do," he added, looking at Estori closely.

"Do you know any Americans?" Estori asked. "Americans from the United States, I mean?"

"Yes," replied the artist, "I know several men of my profession from the United States, and I am often invited to the Anglo-American Club."

"But you do not speak English?"

"No, but they mostly speak French, and some of them very good Italian. Why do you ask?"

"Because," said Estori, "I know a young girl, a young lady from New York and I cannot make her out."

"How old is she?"

"Nineteen."

"What is she like?"

"She is a lady, an aristocrat, that I know. If she were one of us I should say she was of noble birth, and yet she is here entirely alone."

"Pretty?"

"Beautiful."

"Some American adventuress probably, come to try her luck in Italy," said Fauvel.

"Oh, no, no," exclaimed Estori indignantly, "she is nothing of the sort. She is quiet and modest and good. Women that stamp have money, have they not? This one is poor. Is *she* for whom I asked your assistance in finding pupils."

"Ah," said Fauvel, "I thought it was some man who gave English lessons, this friend you were so anxious to help; so it is a girl?"

Estori colored. "A young lady," he corrected, "and I want to help her, for she has no one but me."

"How is that?"

"Oh, she has a few acquaintances," he explained, "but the ladies with whom she came from her own land have left her. She has been companion to the granddaughter of the Conte Melzi, but she has left her now."

"Oh, I see," said Fauvel. "She has been a sort of *dame compagnie* to the little Melzi?"

"Precisely."

"And you are her self-appointed guardian," he added smiling. "But what is the mystery about her, the part you do not understand?"

"That her relatives, in the United States, should allow her to work like this when without a doubt they are rich. My grandmother, Donna Bianca Salviate, wonders the same."

## *The Weaving of the Fates* 75

"Well," replied Fauvel, "you must know that the people of the United States are very different from us Europeans, even from the English. Why there's as much difference between an Englishman and an American as there is between an acorn and a chestnut. They do not take the same care of their young women as we do of ours; and again the American girl has a will of her own. She is very independent. They are wonderful women too; they will not be kept in the background. As a rule they are pretty and clever and sharp. Your young friend may have quarreled with her family and prefers to live away from home even if she has to support herself."

"Perhaps you are right, Signor Fauvel. She has told me that something happened at home to make her unhappy and she does not wish to go back. You say you really have some pupils?"

"Yes, two little sons of Madame Tardieu. They are going to school in England next winter and speak some English already. Their mother is a pupil of mine and an old friend. That small copy of Titian's 'Sacred and Profane Love' in the studio was done by her. If you will bring Mademoiselle, your friend, to see me, so that she may tell me her terms, etc., I will arrange an interview for her with Madame Tardieu."

"Oh, thank you! How very kind you are, Signore."

"Not at all," said Fauvel, "I believe in our helping one another." Then he took some paper money out of his pocket and handed Estori a fifty lire note. "I told you a few moments ago that I had sold three pictures; and it is my custom whenever I am so fortunate, to give something in charity. I fancy you will know where to place this better than I, so I am going to ask you to be my almoner."

"*Signore mio*, how good, how generous you are; I know so many who are suffering and I cannot help them all." And he thought with relief of how the rent and some comforts

would be now assured to old Assunta for many months. "Grazie tante."

"I do not want any thanks," Fauvel said. "Come soon and bring the young lady. I shall be here every day now, for the light is good until late in the afternoon. I expect to hear any day from that editor in Florence and by the way," he added as Estori started to go, "was that Prince Estori who died a few weeks ago any relation of yours?"

"He was my father's cousin," he answered. "Oh, you should have been at the Solemn Requiem at Sant' Andrea della Vale. Such flowers, such beautiful music! Steffanini from the Lateran sang the solos, and I served the Cardinal at the Mass — I."

Fauvel accompanied his guest to the top of the stairs, and watched him as he ran down lightly.

"I understand now," he said to himself, "from whence comes his fine, proud carriage and his *hauteur*; the blood of the ancient Roman nobility flows in his veins, but his features are not Roman, they are too perfect — I wonder who his mother was?"

Donna Bianca and Margaret had a little time for conversation the next afternoon before Fra Felice came in and the lady confided to her how indignant she was that the old Prince had left no legacy to "her boy," as she called him, though of course now it would become the common property of the Order, as he "was professed." She also told her that the Marchese Pallavicino had been appointed Consul to Algiers, and would soon take his departure with his family, and wondered if the Marchesa would see her son before she went away.

Margaret left the house first but had only gone a short distance when she heard soft footsteps behind her and saw Estori had followed.

"Signorina," he said, "why not come to my friend the artist now? His place is on your way home and I am not due at the Convent for an hour."

"Very well," she replied. She had nothing to do and it is too fine a day to go indoors.

"I will go ahead," he said, "and you follow."

So they proceeded down the Via Pansiperina, the straight, outhful figure in the brown habit a few yards ahead, and the light girlish one behind, and no other word was exchanged until Estori stopped at Fauvel's door in the Vicolo San Nicola da Tolentino and five minutes after Margaret was introduced to *il Signore Artista*, and was not surprised to find he had blond hair, and a blond beard, and was the man to whom she had spoken that day in December, on the Palatine, and had noticed again on Christmas night.

"We have met before, Mademoiselle," Fauvel said cordially.

"Yes, Monsieur, and now I see it is to you that I owe my friendship with Fra Felice."

Fauvel had spoken in French, remembering that she had addressed him in that language as he had sat sketching the convent wall and Estori looked in a puzzled manner from one to the other, not understanding and yet seeing they were not strangers; when they explained, he said, "So Signore, you and the Signorina are older friends than she and I?" And then Margaret had to explain the manner of her meeting with the other and how she had lost her way, how Fra Felice had taken her back to town, and their subsequent friendship.

"Quite a little romance," Fauvel said to himself, as he watched them together and noted how Estori's color came and went every time Margaret addressed him; "there's a good share of personal interest here, not altogether benevolence in wishing to help her." She had some very good points, he thought, as he took her in. She was the acme of refinement; her voice was low and well placed and her skin was wonderful in its whiteness and texture and with her chestnut brown hair and eyes made a pleasing combination. He asked her about her lessons and told her that Madame Tardieu would see her

any morning, and found the little American spoke intelligently and in excellent French; and Estori amused himself with the macaw while they conversed.

When they were gone Fauvel sat down in his great arm chair and lighted a cigarette.

"So she is the 'Lonely Rose' of his poem," he soliloquized. "My poor, handsome, ingenuous Estori. How strange that I should have thrown them together. Trouble is destined to come of this," he thought, then exclaimed half aloud: "*Mais foi!* How cruel fate is to some of us!"

## CHAPTER VIII

### "AMORE MIO!"

Oh cease to affirm that man since his birth  
From Adam till now has with wretchedness strove;  
Some portion of Paradise still is on earth  
And Eden revives in the first kiss of love.

BYRON.

At first it had seemed delightful to Margaret to be absolutely free, but two weeks had passed and the novelty had worn off. She was very lonely at times and when she appeared in the evenings at dinner, daintily gowned, some of the guests at the Pension Luella would look askance at her. Why should a girl earning her own living have such costly attire. Every other young woman in the house had a mother, father, aunt or some one with her and she was alone, without a soul to care how she came or went.

She found that Madame Tardieu would give no more than fifty cents an hour for the English lessons of her little boys; she taught them for an hour twice a week, which was 10 *lire*. She received 15 *lire* a week for reading each morning to the blind lady, making 25 *lire* altogether and it cost her 75 *lire* a week for her board, besides incidental expenses. She had saved nearly all of her salary, Donna Bianca was trying to find her more pupils, also the nuns, and Monsieur Fauvel. If she could only hold out until June, she need not worry.

She wrote home cheerful letters; that she had fallen in love with this ugly-beautiful, ancient-modern city, had made "splendid" friends, and her prospects were excellent.

Almost every day she and Estori managed to meet somewhere for a few moments. At Assunta's or at the Piazza Venezia when she would go to the bank for her mail. At these times Estori would watch for her, standing in the shadow

of the old castellated Venetian Palace; then Margaret would come from the bank, cross the street to where she saw a brown figure waiting and without exchanging a word or look they would walk as strangers until safe within the church of San Marco just around the corner.

San Marco was an excellent place to meet. It is out of the way, and scarcely even a tourist is seen, as there is nothing of any particular interest except the early Christian inscriptions outside, which sometimes attract scholars; but for the most part it is empty, save an occasional pious person intent on his prayers. Here they might talk without being conspicuous and plan where and how they could meet the next day and if anything should prevent, then they could write. Many little perfumed notes found their way into the chestnut tree and after them coins into the pockets of Jacopo.

Once Margaret had said to him, "Do you think it is right for us to meet as we do?" And he had replied in his naïve, innocent way, "Why not, whom are we harming?" True, they were harming no one and she said nothing more.

She was growing anxious as the days wore on. What if her money should give out before she secured another position or found pupils enough to meet her expenses? Every day she went into the Piazza di Spagna to the Bureau of Requirements and to the English Library where the ladies in charge sometimes knew of pupils to be had, or positions to be filled and though they assured her they had not forgotten her nothing ever came of it. She found there was a great prejudice in Rome against the English or Americans and it was almost impossible to persuade an Italian to take lessons of one.

One afternoon she had made her rounds as usual without success and her anxiety was turning to dread. She realized that it was too expensive for her at the Luella and that she must make a change. She knew there were plenty of convent pensions, with moderate terms and poor food, where young *ladies might board* and be under the protection of the nuns,

but just now that atmosphere was repellent to her. If there were no convents or monasteries in existence Estori would be free to walk with her, visit her and care for her openly; how easily then all her difficulties could be solved. That he was deeply and sincerely attached to her there was no doubt. She felt it in the strong clasp of his hand, she read it in the depth of his eyes, she would have known it from the happy look that lighted his face whenever he saw her, even if those unguarded words spoken in the Via dei Serpenti has never escaped his lips.

And she — first of all there was a qualm of conscience that was unpleasant. She loved his beauty. It was a delight to feast her eyes on his wonderful, changeful face, one moment rapt in a spiritual expression, the next aglow with radiant smiles, then dark and fiery, or sweet and tender. Each day his society was becoming more necessary to her and this afternoon having been told again that there were no prospects ahead she left the Piazza di Spagna behind her with a troubled spirit and walked down the Via Condotti with its fascinating shops. She did not stop to look in any of the windows but hurried on and turned into the Corso, which was crowded as usual at that time.

The papers were just out and the newsboys were screaming “*Il Messaggero*,” “*Giornale d’Italia*,” etc., at the top of their lungs. Knots of men of the leisure class in front of the cafés blocked the street and more than one stared at her and murmured “*Carina*,” as she passed and followed her until he saw that she paid no attention to his overtures. Margaret had never before walked alone on the Corso at this hour. It had been one of the strict rules of Mrs. Kotrell that none of the young ladies should be seen there unattended. But to-day she did not care, she neither saw nor heard anything distinctly. She was too anxious to notice and too lonely to heed; the very crowds intensified her loneliness and she made her way through them with only her goal, San Marco, in mind.

Finally she reached the Piazza Venezia and gave a quick glance over the way. She saw several brown-habited monks scattered among the crowd. Some of them were Capuchins with their long beards and although she spied two or three smooth-faced Franciscans, none of them had the noble bearing by which she could know Estori among a hundred. Perhaps by the time she came out of the bank he would be in his accustomed place. She went in always with the faint hope that Cousin Cornelia would relent and write her. The clerk handed her a letter; it was from her sister Josephine. She came out again and still Estori was not there. She was greatly disappointed, waited ten minutes and then concluded to go round to the church and perhaps he might come in. Inside she took a seat beside a kneeling bench where a ray of afternoon sunshine was streaming from a window high above her and opened her letter. It was characteristic of her sister, full of her own affairs. It began by saying she was the happiest woman in the world. Her husband's grandmother had died and left him heir to five hundred thousand dollars and her country residence on Long Island, which they intended to remodel. Little Phil and baby Alice had the whooping cough, light cases; she was anxious but not worried. They were glad to hear she had gotten along so well with the countess, and had another position in view. It was a splendid chance to perfect herself in Italian. "There is nothing you could do here," Josephine wrote. "Mother is far from well, and you would just be an extra burden on her. Doctor Parkham says she really ought to give up and rest; but she cannot afford to, and she will not let Phil and me help her, and she is too proud to accept anything more from Cousin Cornelia after the way you acted. Just think, you would be a rich woman now with a home of your own, if you had not been such a little fool."

There was not a word about missing her or any sisterly message.

"*Oh, Josephine,*" she cried, crushing the letter in her hand,

"you are so happy, you have everything you want, and all this money coming to you, while I have nothing and I need help so much!" Tears came to her eyes as she contrasted her lot with her sister's. Josephine surrounded by affectionate care and love, in ease and comfort, while she was all alone in a strange country, and unprotected, her hard-worked, brave little mother half sick, and Cousin Cornelia with her millions, hard as a stone; and now even Estori had forgotten. The tears rolled down her cheeks. She leaned forward against the kneeling-bench and covered her face with her handkerchief.

"Margherita."

The word was whispered so low that she thought it a fancy of her brain.

"Margherita."

She looked around and saw the young Franciscan standing behind her. He had stolen up with his soft, panther-like movements and she had not heard a sound; he was leaning over her.

"Margherita," he said, "my heart told me I would find you here. I was detained at the convent, I could not get away. Forgive me. Oh what, what is the matter, you are crying! What is it? Tell me, let me help you. You shall tell me what makes you unhappy; it tears my soul out to see you like this; Margherita, don't you know there is nothing I would not do for you, if I could," and he tried to raise her.

"I am not unhappy now," she answered, looking up at him with a smile; when he was near her all her troubles seemed to diminish; "but I will tell you something that worries me: I cannot afford to live at the Luella. Do you know of any private family who would let me board with them where it would not cost so much?"

"No," he said after a moment's thought; "there are plenty of poor places which are not good enough for you, and the better class of Italians do not take boarders in their families; but stop, there is Fauvel, he would be likely to know, as his pupils board all over; *come, let us go and ask Fauvel.*"

Margaret rose and they walked towards the door. He paused on the steps that led up to the vestibule and said: "All these tears because you have to find other quarters. *Stia tranquilla*, I will arrange it. To me, Margherita, you are a mystery."

"Yes," said Fauvel, "I think I know what you want," when they were seated in his "lounge" and had told him the object of their visit. "The Scotti family right next door have rooms to rent; they are clean and comfortable. I roomed there myself once; I cannot say about the meals, as I always went over to the hotel. The Signora is a motherly sort of person and will do all she can for you. I am sorry, Mademoiselle," he added kindly, "that things are not looking brighter for you."

He was interested in Margaret for Estori's sake as well as her own. He admired her good breeding and taste in dress but could not understand why she should be in Europe alone. There was nothing of the Bohemian, or adventuress about her and she had not come to cultivate any talent, but just to pick up a miserable living like a canary bird turned out of its cage.

"I believe I can manage if I cut down my expenses," she replied. "Do you think, Monsieur, they would take me for 50 *lire* a week?"

"They ought to, but you've no idea how prices have gone up in this city; why, Rome is becoming as expensive as Paris. Perhaps I could make a better bargain than you could, Mademoiselle, I shall be glad to serve you. There is the Signora now," he said, glancing out of a window that faced those of the next building at right angles; "if you will excuse me," he added, "I will go over and speak with her."

"Monsieur, I do not like to give you that trouble," Margaret began.

"It is not the slightest trouble, I assure you. The balconies connect; I need not even go downstairs."

"How kind and thoughtful that is!" Margaret said, after *he had gone*.

"He is *gentilissimo*," Estori answered. "He is one of the kindest men I ever knew. He believes in making every one happy."

"He makes beautiful pictures," she said; then remembering the conversation of the artists she had heard on Christmas night when Fauvel had told his companions that he had found a prize if he could get him, she asked: "Has he ever painted you?"

A look of displeasure darkened his face.

"No, never. I have no money to pay for a portrait of myself, and if I had I would not want it."

"I thought you might have sat for him sometimes as a model."

"No, indeed," he said scornfully; "it is a common, low thing to be a model."

"I would not be insulted if an artist asked me to sit for him; I should consider it a compliment."

"Signorina!"

"Oh, do not be alarmed; I will never have an opportunity. I am not handsome like you. If I were in your place, I would certainly let Monsieur Fauvel paint my portrait. I believe he will be a great artist some day. I hear him spoken of, and they say he is still young."

"Fauvel is not young; he must be forty."

"He does not look that old," she said; "he has not a gray hair in his head." Then she added thoughtfully: "What will you be, I wonder, when you are his age?"

He wrote something on a slip of paper and handed it to her.

"Cardinal Estori," she read. "I cannot imagine you a Cardinal."

"Why not? There have been Cardinals of my name before, and my own people as well as my step-father's have influence. Know, Signorina, that the house of Estori has always been a staunch supporter of the Vatican and received the 'Golden Rose' for its devotion and loyalty. We were once mighty,

but we are dying out. My father was an only son; I am his only child. My second cousin, the late Prince, left an only child, and he has but one, an infant son. There are only three of us left: Daniele Estori, his little one, and myself. But Daniele will have other children, and when I am old they will come to see their cousin, the good Cardinal Estori," and he smiled, but it was not a happy smile.

"So you are ambitious to be a Prince of the Church," she said.

"Yes." He thought also of his poetical ambition, but did not wish to mention that until he should hear from the editor in Florence.

They were both silent for a moment; he was scribbling "Cardinal Estori" over the paper in an absent-minded way, and Margaret was thinking. She was the first to speak.

"If you want to be a Cardinal, you would be wise never to meet me again."

He looked up with a questioning expression.

"Yes," she continued, "you must not do anything that your superiors would object to if you wish to be advanced."

He flung the paper and pencil upon the table, saying: "I would rather see you than be the Pope of Rome!"

"I am not worth that," she said simply.

"You are worth the whole world to me, Margherita."

Something in the low, intense tone startled her. She rose quickly, went to the window and looked down into the courtyard where some rabbits were gamboling. As she did so Josephine's letter fell to the floor. He stooped to pick it up and saw the stamp of the United States.

"Ha!" he said, "I know what has made you cry; it was bad news from your home. Before the sun sets you shall tell me your trouble. Have your family turned you off?"

"No, oh, no, not exactly ——"

"Some one is unkind to you?"

"Yes — no — Oh, I don't know what I'm saying," she

replied, dropping down on the sofa and hiding her face in a cushion; "never mind my trouble."

"But I shall mind," he declared, "while you suffer. Were you engaged to be married, Signorina, and it is broken off?"

"I broke it off," she said, "and that is why my sister, and the cousin who did so much for me, are angry. He was very rich, but I did not love him; I could not bear him. So I ran away just before the marriage, which made them all fearfully angry. That is why I came to Rome, to get away from it all. That is why they will do nothing to help me, that is why," and she gave a little sob, "I am so *dreadfully* poor! Oh, but don't let's talk of it; you are shielded and cared for in your convent life, you know nothing about it."

"Ah ——" he groaned; "I only know I *love* you."

Margaret lifted her face.

"Yes," he said, seating himself beside her, "I love you, Margherita, do not move away; do you hear me? I think of you by day, I dream of you by night, I forget everything when I am with you, even that I am wearing this," touching his habit, "for when I walk through our chapel I kiss the stones where you have knelt ——"

Nearer and nearer his face came to hers, and again she felt that strange thrill of delight as the spell of his beauty crept over her; it was like music and the perfume of roses. His great yellow eyes were shining like two golden stars; unconsciously their lips met. "Margherita," he whispered, clasping her in his arms, "*Amore mio!*"

Footsteps were heard in the next room. Fauvel had returned.

When he entered, Margaret was gazing out of the window; Estori was standing by the table intent upon some pencil sketches that were lying there.

"I have settled it, Mademoiselle," Fauvel said pleasantly; "you can have the room with meals and lights, for 50 *lire* a week. Signora Scotti asks if you will step over and look at it now. She is waiting on the balcony."

"Oh, thank you, Monsieur," Margaret replied, in an unsteady voice; "I will go at once, and will say good afternoon to you both."

"To-morrow at five, Piazza Venezia," were Estori's quick words as he helped her over the balcony.

"Now," said Fauvel, as soon as they were alone, "I have some good news for you. Your verses have been accepted, and Ricci, the editor, asks you to send him others."

"*Buonissimol*!" cried Estori, "is that really true? I never thought of success like this! How can I ever thank you, Signore, you are so good to me and to the Signorina."

Fauvel smiled, for he delighted in giving pleasure. "They will come out some time during the summer," he explained. "This magazine does not pay until the articles are published."

"Oh, I do not care for money."

"Nonsense! We all care for money."

"I would rather have fame," Estori said shyly.

"Have both if you can. If you made money, you might be able to help Mademoiselle." This was spoken covertly.

The younger man's expression altered. "I am greatly distressed about her," he said. "What are these?" he asked by way of changing the conversation. He had taken up the pencil sketches and was looking them over.

"Those," said Fauvel, "are rough drawings I made of my old place in the mountains, *Rocca Serrata*, it is called. I believe I told you that a friend of mine left it to me in his will. It is only a ruin and he bought it for a mere song, but we artists admired it for its loneliness and grandeur. From the ninth to the fourteenth centuries it was an impenetrable fortress. That sketch you hold in your hand is of the ramparts and east wing, the only portion of it that is really habitable."

"Do you ever live there?"

"I expect to stay there part of this summer. I shall enlarge *from sketches* and do some studying for next winter's work.

One can find no quieter place for work and study. The nearest railroad town is fifteen miles away and only a handful of stupid peasants live in the hamlet at the foot of the hill. But I love it because it is old and saturated with history. I fancy there is a good deal of the archæologist in me."

"Then," said Estori, "I have something with me that might interest you." He fumbled in his pockets and, producing a wallet, took from it a small black finger ring.

"What is it?" asked Fauvel.

"That's what I want to know myself. I have never shown it to any one before."

Fauvel took the ring and examined it closely. "It is of ancient workmanship, that much I can tell you for a certainty. Where did you get it?"

"I found it in the sub-cellar under our convent." He did not think it necessary to explain about the hidden chamber. "And if you please, Signore, do not mention it to any one. The government threatens to expel us and tear down our house in order to excavate. It is believed there are many old things to be found underneath us." As he spoke he glanced slyly at Fauvel, who was busy scrutinizing the ring. "I suppose it is bronze," he continued; "don't you think so?"

"I am not sure." Fauvel went into the studio and opened a closet in the wall where he kept an assortment of bottles. Choosing a small phial, he uncorked it and poured a drop or two upon the ring. Soon a bright spot appeared. Estori watched him eagerly. "I thought so," Fauvel exclaimed; "it is good old Roman gold, but this acid is not strong enough to clear it entirely. It is corroded by damp and age. Let me take it to my jeweler and we will see; may I?"

"Certainly; keep it, only do not let any one be curious."

"No, I will arrange that; I think you have found something of genuine antiquity. It is a woman's ring, and it looks like the workmanship of the first century. I have seen some in the museums. I believe they were the marriage rings of the an-

cients; a marriage ring," he repeated, "emblem of eternal unity."

There was a decided sarcasm in his voice, as he pronounced the last words; so much so that Estori asked quickly, "You do not believe in marriage?"

"I do not believe in any legal contract of hearts; leave out the question of hearts and marriage in the aggregate is well enough."

"But the sacramental marriage," he gasped, "the church's marriage?"

"From my point of view the church's marriage is no more than the legal contract. I do not believe in vows and chains. Oh, I know what your argument is, of course; 'what God hath joined together,' etc. But in how many marriages is God a consideration? Take the case of a young girl forced to marry a man she loathes, yet the church will pronounce its blessing over her. Has God anything to do with that? What of the man who marries, loving and believing he is loved in return while the woman is taking him for his money, and vice versa; is God there? And the parties who are utterly indifferent to one another and yet marry for worldly ambition or convenience, are such people joined together by God?"

"Do you not believe in love, Signore?"

"Love? Oh, that is a different matter. True love needs no chains. It will be enduring and self-sacrificing to the end. I believe in a love that requires neither bonds nor chains to imprison it, but will remain faithful for its own sake. There are cases in all ages of the most devoted love and fidelity where no marriage has ever taken place. True hearts need no fetters."

"But what about the moral law?" asked Estori simply.

"The law of love is higher than the moral law. 'God is Love.'"

The young Franciscan was deep in thought as he wended his way homeward. He loved Margherita with all the strength of *his fresh, innocent heart*. In the beginning she had excited his

sympathy and interest, and she was unlike any other young girl he had ever met. The very fact that she had some troubles made her doubly dear to him, and that she should have to fight the world for a living distressed him beyond measure. He longed to protect her and shield her and make her happy, and ah! how easily it could be done if he were free; for now he knew that she returned his love, and what a Paradise on earth they could make together! He thought of the beautiful home he had renounced. With what joy he could have thrown wide the door and have said, “Enter, Margherita, as my wife and be *domina* here forever.”

As he walked past the Colosseum he saw the dilapidated buildings that composed the monastery, high upon the crest of the Palatine. How many hundreds of souls, he thought, had crushed out under its roof the hopes, desires and longings of life! He wished he were not obliged to return; he felt upset and rebellious. He would like to dine to-night with his cousins at their elegantly appointed table. The few days he had spent with them and the easy, luxurious life of the Palazzo Estori had sown seeds of discontent. It would not be such a terrible sin to stay out without permission. When he reached the Arch of Titus he stood still. A few minutes more and the convent door would close upon him and so would end the never-to-be-forgotten day when for one moment he had held Margherita in his arms. The memory of it sent the hot blood leaping in his veins.

A wild desire to break away suddenly took possession of him. What was to prevent his running off and taking Margherita with him! Fauvel had said the “*law of love is higher than the moral law*,” and would not their love compensate for anything they might lose by such steps? Besides, he had not yet taken sacerdotal vows; he could retract.

He watched the sun going down behind the Marmertime Prison like a huge orange-colored globe, and its brilliancy was focussed in a shaft of light upon the ruined Atrium of the

House of the Vestal Virgins, below him in the Forum, and his thoughts turned to those pagan maidens of two thousand years ago who had lived under vows and of the ghastly punishment that the violation of their vows had brought upon them. Walled up alive, horrible thought! It made him shudder. He wondered if the religious orders of the Christian church had conceived their idea of celibacy from the vestal virgins. When one came to think of it the vow was the same, chastity and sworn obedience to that binding rule of celibacy.

The frightful physical punishment of the transgressor had been done away with, but there still remained the mental punishment, the widespread disgrace, the dishonor and the cold shoulder of the world, towards the fallen Religious. Could he ever ask Margherita to share this? Ah, even if she were willing, he had no home to give her. Stern, cold duty was ahead of him. An Estori had never broken his word. There had been soldiers of his name as well as princes and statesmen and cardinals; brave, true men, who had given up everything that life held dear to fight for their king.

The "Ave Maria" rang out from the old bell-tower above him just as the sun set. It aroused him like a bugle call to arms; he must answer it, for was he not a soldier too and in the service of the "King of Kings"?

He turned his back upon the city and walked bravely up the hill.

## CHAPTER IX

### AN UNEXPECTED BLOW

"Spirit of Earth and Air and Fire,  
Skim the dross and fan the flame!  
Behold the might of young desire,  
Rise, sweet Spirit, at thy name."

They had both acknowledged their love, and it was useless to deceive themselves or each other longer.

Estori had no idea how to grasp the tangled situation. He was of a dependent disposition. If he retracted he would lose the esteem, regard and support of every friend he had, with the exception of his new acquaintance, the artist Fauvel. He would be thrown upon the world without resources and without influence. There would be nothing for him to do unless perhaps he became a common tradesman on a starvation salary. He could not expect Margherita to marry him under such conditions. His monastic training had unfitted him for any walk in life where he would be obliged to earn his bread.

Fauvel had hinted, that he might engage lawyers and try to recover his own property. But he was legally of age when he had signed it away, and such a proceeding would involve notoriety and, besides, it would leak out that it was done for a woman, and Margherita's name might be dragged in, and even if he won his suit they would begin life under a cloud.

Now he was in good repute with his superiors. Church dignitaries kept kindly, watchful eyes upon him, which he understood meant favor in the future, and since the death of the old Prince a friendship had sprung up between his cousin Daniele and himself. Permission was never refused him to be with this cousin, and much of the time that he was supposed to spend at the Palazzo Estori was passed in the company of Margherita and Fauvel.

*He was one of those easy-going creatures who are content*

with the present and confide in the future, very young for his years and to youth, though shrouded in a monk's cowl, hope turns her shining face. There was more than a year yet before he would take his priestly vows, and during that time some opening might present itself by which it would be made easier for him to assert himself and renounce the cloister. But he suffered in his conscience, for he was now leading a false life. One by one he omitted little pious practises. He became thoughtful and taciturn, and his smile lost its ingenuous radiancy.

As for Margaret, she was contented to drift with the knowledge that she possessed the love of any one so beautiful and unusual; the very barrier gave it a glamour and romance, and their secret was wonderful and interesting.

She carried her head high as she went from place to place where the nuns or the bureaux would send her, and at last she found an Irish lady who wished to be accompanied sightseeing twice a week and although she only received 2 *lire* each time they stopped out for luncheon where she enjoyed a wholesome, appetizing meal, for the table at the Scottis' was very meager. This was a little encouraging, and it made her look brighter, so that one day Fauvel said to himself, "She just escapes being extremely pretty."

Towards the middle of May, Donna Bianca Salviate went to Sweden to live for two years with a married daughter. It was with genuine regret that Margaret bade her good-by, and to Estori the departure of his dear "Madrina" was an actual grief.

Margaret was fairly comfortable at the Scottis', but her evenings were terribly dull, for she was their only boarder and she had nothing in common with them, so after dinner she would shut herself in her room and read or study Italian until bedtime. Sometimes she would open the big wardrobe and look with a little sigh at the pretty dresses hanging there, for living *as she did* she had no opportunity to wear them. One of her

chief solaces was the weekly visit of Giacinta, who came with her linen. The faithful woman would overlook Margaret's apparel, brush and mend, and care for her in a general way that only one so lonely could appreciate. She enjoyed teaching the well-behaved boys of Madame Tardieu, and often Fauvel would ask the latter and herself to his apartment for afternoon tea. Usually Estori would happen in also and assist them in filling the water kettle, and sugar bowl, and although he could not be persuaded to taste the tea, there was always vermouth on the sideboard.

The young monk considered the artist the cleverest and most generous-hearted person he had ever known, though he could not approve of some of his ideas and moral or lack of moral convictions. He kept his friend supplied with his red roses, also he presented him with quantities of oranges. His mother owned a large grove of orange trees south of Naples and lately she had sent him crates of the luscious fruit to be divided among his companions at the convent, and two big sacks had found their way by a trusty messenger to the Vicolo San Nicola da Tolentino.

The friendship between the two deepened now and grew, and Estori, knowing he was more than welcome at the studio, scarcely let a day pass without coming in, while Fauvel had been shown all over the monks' garden and through as much of their convent as a layman was allowed to enter.

About this time the Marchese Pallavicino arrived in Rome prior to starting with his family for Algiers, and during these days his step-father claimed Estori. Once they went to the Vatican where the Marchese had an interview with the Cardinal Secretary of State, the nature of which Estori did not know, for he waited in an ante-chamber while the Marchese was closeted with the Cardinal. Soon his mother was expected, and he was looking forward to seeing her with untold joy; she had last seen him as a boy; what would she think of the grown man?

The spring was advancing, and Fauvel longing for a breath of country air, invited him to join Madame Tardieu, her boys, Margaret, and himself for a day's excursion out to Frascati. The Father Superior had met the artist, "the nephew of a Belgian Bishop," and had readily given his permission, for Fra Felice was rarely refused a request. They were all to meet in front of the Grand Hotel, where a carriage would be in readiness.

Estori was the first to arrive, and while he stood waiting for the others he noticed a man whom he tried to avoid recognizing. He was Angelo Dompi, a sort of factotum of his step-father's, a gossip and busy-body. Estori was much annoyed. He was going with the full sanction of his Superior, to accompany the artist on a rural jaunt, but he had not mentioned that there were others included in the invitation, and some of them ladies. This man had once made trouble for him, as a boy, at home, and it was with a vague apprehension that he now saw him. Dompi came forward and he was obliged to speak to him, after which Estori made some pretext for going into the hotel, in hopes of getting rid of him, but when he came out again Dompi was still there, and watched the whole party drive off.

On reaching Frascati, they went first to the Monastery of Grotta Ferrata to see the famous frescoes of Domenichino, and after studying them and the antiquity of the building which dated from the year 1002, they drove to the Villa Aldobrandini, stopping on the way to buy some of the "*Vino vero di Frascati*."

Leaving the carriage in the town, they ascended the terrace where the mountain stream has been caught and made to run in a regular channel, emptying its cascade into marble basins as it flows down the hillside. Beside one of these basins, about halfway up, they seated themselves and spread out the luncheon.

"This country air gives me an appetite," said Margaret; "I am ashamed of the way I am eating."

She was enjoying every moment.

*How happy she might be, she thought, in the society of these*

delightful friends, if it were not for the everlasting worry over money matters!

"We have done well by the wine of Frascati," Fauvel said, filling the glasses from the last flask; "there is such a difference when one drinks it here on the spot; it seems to lose its flavor after being carted into the city."

When the repast was finished Margaret rose. "I am in a cramp from sitting so long on the ground," she exclaimed. "I think I will run to the top of the hill; who wants to come?"

The boys were still nibbling at the sweets, Fauvel and Madame Tardieu had lighted cigarettes and made themselves comfortable against some stones; Estori did not smoke. "I do!" he cried promptly; then Gervais decided to go too, and Raoul followed his brother.

Margaret was gowned in a light blue linen suit and broad-brimmed sailor hat and in spite of the afternoon heat of a late spring day, looked cool and fresh and sweet.

"What an attractive little thing she is!" Madame Tardieu remarked, as she watched them move away through the trees. "What can her people be thinking of to allow her to wander around Europe alone and not provide her with sufficient means? She does not seem to have a cent to spare; she walks to my house in all sorts of weather to save two *soldi* \* in the 'tram.' I am interested in her, Meurice; I wish I could afford to take her with me this summer. The boys are quite devoted to her."

"So is some one else," he remarked, with a slight wave of his hand towards the group, who were out of hearing.

Madame Tardieu glanced up from her cigarette and saw Estori bending over Margaret in a very loverlike attitude.

"Yes," she said, "I have noticed they are fond of each other."

"Fond of each other! They are madly in love, and they flatter themselves that no one suspects it. They are playing with fire."

\* *Pennies.*

"And you encourage them!"

Fauvel laughed.

"It is wrong of you," she cried; "very wrong when you know there can never be anything between them, considering what he is."

"He is a man."

"It is not kind," she continued; "they will find trouble enough in this world without your adding to it. You are bad, Fauvel, and no fit companion for the young." Madame Tardieu laughed as she reproved him, but he could see that she was half in earnest, for he exclaimed:

"Why, I am their best friend! *Ma foi*, what is it? Fate has thrown them together, not I! I frankly confess I should like to see them in each other's arms."

"Meurice Fauvel, you are positively shocking!"

"*Fi donc, ma chère Louise*, those are my opinions; you are as free to yours. I feel very strongly on the subject of heredity. If you had seen life as I have seen it in my hospital days, the deformities, the weaklings, mental and physical, that come into the world tainted with disease before they are born, all these things that make birth a greater tragedy than death. Pshaw!" he continued, "the world has to be populated, *n'est-ce pas?* Now look at those two; what splendid children theirs would be! *Parbleu!* I become so exasperated at times at the sight of that brown habit that I want to tear it off him."

"An unfrocked monk is an unpleasant thing," Madame Tardieu said slowly, "and the world has little use for him."

"I do not agree with you, and in this case there are extenuating circumstances."

"That may be," she answered, "but if you air these sentiments before him, young and impressionable as he is, you may be the cause of his leading a life of deceit and intrigue. If ever a Religious wore his robe spotlessly I believe it is Fra Felice. No, you need not smile, Fauvel. I do not mean that he is *saintly, pas du tout*; his flirtatious manner with Mademoiselle

*par exemple* does not go well with his habit, but he is unconscious of it. There is a charm even in his faults and one cannot look into his gorgeous eyes without seeing innocence. I notice you have an influence over him; beware how you use it."

It was dusk when they drove back into the city through the Lateran Gate. To Estori it was the happiest day of his life, but a disappointment was in store for him. A note from his step-father said he feared the sight of him as a monk would be too much for his mother, after all these years of separation; that it might completely unnerve her for the hard journey before her. Could he be unselfish enough to let her pass through Rome without meeting him? He believed it was best for them both; they would be spared the wrench of parting a second time.

Estori forced back the tears that sprang from a wounded heart. It seemed to him the selfishness was on the other side; but he wrote in reply that he would agree to do whatever was best for Mamma; her peace and welfare must be considered above his desires. He would keep away. None of his friends saw him for several days. Margaret wrote but received no answer, and on the fifth day, anxious and apprehensive, she walked out toward the Palatine. She knew his habits so well, the hours he came and went, that she felt sure she would meet him. She went as far as the Arch of Titus, then stood there to watch and wait.

At intervals brown-robed figures, alone or in couples, passed her on their homeward way. Each time she had it in her mind to speak to one of the brothers and inquire casually if Fra Felice were well, but each time her courage failed her. She had just decided to retrace her steps and ask Fauvel to go to the monastery and find out what had become of him, when she saw Estori coming toward her with an elderly monk on either side of him. He gave a slight start on perceiving her, but no smile of welcome rose to his face; only the color went from it. For one second their eyes met, then he lowered his and passed her by without a

sign of recognition. Her heart stood still; she thought she was going to faint. What could it mean, what had she done that he should treat her thus?

She watched the three brown figures go up the hill until the angle of the high wall hid them from sight, then she noticed a small book lying in the road over which they had gone. She tried to go and pick it up but could not find the strength. She leaned for support against the government rail that encloses the Forum. One of the monks was hurrying back down the path; it was Estori. He stooped and secured the book and in another moment was beside her.

"Thank God, I find you still here, Margherita mia," he said in gasps. "I might not write you, for I have been watched and watched all the time. To-day I managed to post you a letter an hour ago. I dropped my breviary for an excuse to return and if possible speak this word. I may not stop now, the letter will tell you the news that breaks my heart. Margherita — I am to be sent to South America for ten years!"

## CHAPTER X

### "A MAN SET APART"

The pain of my heart escapes me  
In a bitter exceeding cry;  
I writhe in the hand that shapes me:  
Stop, stop all ye that pass by!  
What sorrow is like the sorrow  
From my fresh heart's richness wrung?  
Yet deceive me with no to-morrow —  
I am young, ah, misery, young!

LOUISE BETTS EDWARDS.

Margaret sat in her room near the window that looked out upon the same court as the rear windows of the artist. She was reading Estori's letter which had reached her by the first mail that morning.

It said that by order of the Father General he was to leave for South America within a week, in company of some missionary priests. He had always understood that he would remain in Rome until after he was ordained. Furthermore, he had been allowed freedom to come and go, and suddenly surveillance was put upon him. He was inclined to believe that his step-father's secretary, Dompì, whom he had told her of meeting the day of the Frascati picnic, had in some way been instrumental in letting it reach the superiors how he had seen him drive off in company of ladies. He hoped to meet her the next afternoon at San Marco; still he might not be able to get off alone. In case he should fail to be there, would she come out to the convent; ladies often came to see him about orders for roses, etc., and no remarks would be made. The news had torn his heart in two, he continued. If only his step-father were in the country he would appeal to him to use his influence; but the Marchese had been gone four days. Or if his cousin, the old Prince, were living he would go to him for aid; he feared his young

cousin, Daniele Estori, had not much weight as yet with ecclesiastical leaders, but he would see him and not leave a stone unturned to reverse the order. "And, oh, Margherita," he wrote, "if I am sent there we will never meet again!"

She sat as if turned to stone. She was to lose him; she had no faith in the shreds of hope he held out.

She had never seriously thought about his breaking away from monastic life. All her Catholic training revolted against the idea of marriage with him. She could never forget that he had discarded a habit, and neither of them had money to brazen it through—for the world often pardons gilded disgrace. She had been simply contented with his love; it made her better and braver, and after that once in Fauvel's rooms she had never permitted him to kiss her again.

She had been building upon going later with the Contessa Melzi to Switzerland. She had counted that she and Estori would be only parted for three months and she could save her salary to pay for her board in Rome in the autumn, until she could find work. Now she was indifferent as to whether she came back or not; Rome would not be Rome without him. She put down the letter wearily. Below in the courtyard rabbits were contentedly munching a dirty cabbage. Those stupid little creatures were happy; they were incapable of suffering; she envied them.

The morning wore on slowly; there was nothing to do until the appointed hour that afternoon when she hoped to meet him. Unfortunately there were no lessons or duties to occupy her that day, and it made her remember with a start how low her funds were getting. At last the hands of the clock pointed to half-past four, and she started out.

On reaching the Piazza Venezia she saw that something unusual was taking place. The large open square was filled with people of all classes, talking, screaming and gesticulating wildly. The trams were stopped and blocked, and in some of the shop windows the heavy night shutters were down. A cordon of

soldiers was arranged in front of the old Venetian Palace. Margaret saw that it was impossible to cross the square, or attempt to get to San Marco through that surging, frantic mob.

"What is it, what is it?" she asked of this one and that, who elbowed past her; but she only received broken, incoherent answers in which the words, "blood" and "riot," were all she could make out.

She was frightened at such a wild, uncontrollable excitement. She thought her clothing would be torn to rags and knew her hat was pushed all awry. She tried to turn away, but seemed caught in a whirlpool. She was about to cease struggling and let herself be carried on with the mob when to her intense relief she saw a familiar blond head and beard, conspicuous among the countless dark ones, and Fauvel was passing within reach of her; she stretched out her hand and caught at his sleeve. He stopped suddenly. "Mademoiselle," he exclaimed, and in a moment he had extricated her and brought her to a place of safety.

"Mademoiselle," he said, "you must go home at once. How did you come to be among these ravening wolves?" They were standing in an arcade while Margaret smoothed her attire.

"I come this way every day, Monsieur, and stop at the bank over there for my letters," she explained. "What does it all mean and what are they yelling and screaming about?"

"It does not take much to make an Italian crowd become disorderly, as a rule," he replied, with a half contemptuous smile, as they watched the populace surge by; "but this is really serious. The affair is only just over and the crowd is behaving mildly to what it did a few moments ago. I had been out on the Aventine and was coming back by tram, when the car was stopped for the passing funeral of an anarchist workman who was killed by falling from a scaffold. The police made it come to a halt, for its sensational banners and frenzied lamentations were objectionable to the normal public. The interference caused loud protestations and during the argument some man in

the procession made an insulting remark about the Pope, which was resented. There happened to be a cart filled with loose stones standing by, and before any one could tell who began it, the stones were being hurled back and forth and several were injured."

"Oh, Monsieur," she cried again, white to her lips, "Fra Felice may be among them. I was going to meet him," she faltered, "in San Marco's for a moment. Have you heard that he is to be sent to South America?"

"Yes," said Fauvel, "I've had word from him to that effect."

The artist spoke in the most unconcerned way. Margaret was astonished. If Estori had been going to Naples for a week Fauvel could not have said it any more coolly.

"But don't you think it is dreadful, cruel, that they should send him so far away?" she asked.

"Yes, I am very sorry that he is made unhappy by receiving this order."

Margaret looked up at him quickly. There was a strange expression on his face which she could not understand. Madame Tardieu had told her that Fauvel was a very peculiar man, and she now agreed with her.

"But, Monsieur," she cried, "while we are talking here Fra Felice may be injured, or dead. Can we not find out, is there no way of getting across the street?"

"No," he said, "we can do nothing at present; no one will be allowed to pass that cordon to-night; but I will telephone to the hospitals and let you know as soon as I return after dinner. And now, Mademoiselle, I am going to find a cab and put you in it. I would take you home myself, but I have an engagement in ten minutes."

When he had seen her drive off in safety he called another for himself, and saying to the man, "Aragno's, Corso," jumped in. Then the same strange expression that Margaret had noticed flitted over his face and he fell to working out a problem

that had been in his mind since morning when he had received Estori's letter.

"Some fruit hangs so firmly to the tree," he mused, "that no shaking will dislodge it; it takes a hard blow to send it tumbling down, and when once it has fallen, *c'est bien different*." Just then they passed a jeweler's where in the window was displayed antique jewelry. "*Fermate, cochiere*," he called out suddenly, and the cab drew up sharply. Telling the driver to wait, he entered the shop. Going to the rear he said a few words to a clerk who apparently knew him and in a moment brought him, carefully laid upon a piece of white cotton, a small, shining gold ring. Fauvel was delighted.

"How beautifully it has come out!" he exclaimed; "I was sure I was not mistaken."

"Yes, Signore," replied the clerk, "it is the purest old Roman gold, but it took many treatments to restore it to its original color. It is of most delicate hand-wrought workmanship."

Fauvel held it under the electric light; it was shining, a bright reddish gold and hammered in an unbroken circle. Another moment he was in the cab again. Margaret waited at home in a fever of anxiety. Her great hope was that Estori had not been able to leave the convent unaccompanied, as in that case he would not have gone to the Piazza Venezia. About half-past nine the artist appeared, bringing with him the evening papers and saying that he had telephoned to all the hospitals and there were no priests or monks among the injured. The Signora Scotti and her daughter came in to hear the latest reports.

"The whole town," Fauvel continued, "is in an uproar. I dined early at the Hotel d'Angleterre with friends and, being tired, thought I would drive home. Not a cab to be had, not one. All the drivers are on strike — most of them are socialists and in sympathy, and I had to walk home."

"*Grand Dio*," exclaimed the Signora, "is it as bad as that?"

"It is worse. Every other street loiterer is drunk. But rest assured, Mademoiselle," he said to Margaret in an undertone, "our friend is undoubtedly in all safety upon the Palatine."

He remained with them for a time, then climbed over the balcony to his own apartment.

The following morning Margaret received another note from Estori. "Safe, safe," she murmured as she pressed it to her lips. It was formal and stilted, and began "Signorina. I write to warn you not to go out of doors to-day. Rome is all agitation on account of the revolt. There are many bad things happening and drunkards and ruffians about the streets. I pray you be prudent and do not leave the house. I am busy preparing for my departure, which is arranged for Monday next. If things are more quiet by Sunday I will have permission to visit my friends and bid them farewell. Pray for yours.—FELICE ESTORI."

He had signed his monastic name instead of his baptismal "Leone," which he always used when writing her. She felt convinced the note had to be shown before it was sent and she understood that he was not now free to post it himself. He was to leave on Monday, and this was Friday. How dark the world had grown!

A dismal rain was beating on the window. There was not an English book in the house, and she did not feel equal to attempting an Italian novel. As one sharp physical wound stuns all lesser aches, so the sharp pain of his loss stifled her other worries. Money, the want of it, that had been for so many weeks like a spectre stalking after her, now seemed such a paltry trouble.

Once she had heard Fauvel remark in some argument with Madame Tardieu, that the man and woman who were free to marry the one of their choice could never experience the same keen, intense love as those between whom marriage was impossible. She believed this was so.

The rain continued to pour in drenching torrents; and hour after hour Margaret stood at the window, gazing out — and seeing nothing except the bright "dream youth," as she had first half thought him, so radiant that he had seemed of a different creation from the rest of the world. Now was he to be taken from her! She might live on for years and years and they would never meet again.

The third day Margaret could stand it no longer. She could now count the hours that remained before Estori must depart, and she determined to try and see him; something might prevent his coming to-morrow, it might be her last chance—

When she announced her intention of going out, her landlady help up her hands in horror, but Margaret was undaunted, and dressing herself in a quiet, tailor-made suit, slipped fearlessly from the house.

It was about four in the afternoon and the city, usually teeming with life at that hour, now seemed deserted. The trams were not running and the cab drivers were still on strike. All the shops were closed, with their windows shuttered and barred. There were detachments of soldiers at every other street corner. She passed groups of sullen-looking men loitering at the doors of wine shops, and others playing "Morra," with the usual wrangling.

No one molested her and her walk was almost finished. She was approaching the dear, familiar road with the Stations of the Cross, where months before the tall eucalyptus trees, that now met overhead in an archway of greenery, had been leafless and bare and an artist had advised her to go up and see how beautiful it was where the avenue came to an end. What she had found had been Estori, and now the brief chapter in his life and hers had come to as unexpected an end as the picturesque path that stopped at the monastery door.

She was pulling the old bell rope before she knew it; she would not allow herself to think, she would break down if she did. In another moment the burly monk who served as porter

pushed back a small slide in the door and was peering out cautiously, and she was asking for "Fra Felice."

Telling her to wait, he closed it again. Then she heard the creaking of bars from inside the church door and the porter opened it, motioning her to enter.

It seemed as if she had waited a long time. The church was dark and felt cold and damp to her, coming in from the warm sunshine. At last she heard a slight sound and, looking up, saw Estori standing behind the bars that screened off the high altar.

She came towards him with faltering steps. Never before had she realized the wide gulf that separated them; now she saw him as "a man set apart." In spite of their common youth, their affection, the innocent, happy hours they had spent together, there was a difference between them as great as that of darkness and light, and the bars through which she saw him were the visible type of those other bars that should keep them apart all of their lives. As she drew nearer she saw that his eyes showed traces of tears and had dark circles around them; but this did not mar the sweetness of his expression, for his face had lost its almost audacious beauty and become more spiritual. He waited until she was close to the bars, and then spoke.

"Signorina," he began, and she felt he was speaking under restraint, "I wrote and warned you not to come out; it is very imprudent."

"No," she said, "it is not. I could not stay at home any longer, knowing you — you were ——" She broke off. "I would brave any danger to come to —— Oh!" she cried, choking back a sob, "Leone, my heart is breaking!"

"No more than mine, Margherita," he whispered; "not as much as mine." He spoke very low, and she felt sure that from behind the lattice-work above some eye was upon them.

"Is it hopeless?" she asked.

"Yes, I have appealed in vain. We must speak louder and on ordinary topics," he said quickly.

There was no other topic that her mind could hold, so she inquired in as ordinary tones as she could command if he had seen Fauvel.

"No, but I have had the kindest letter from him. He is my very good friend — and yours, Signorina. To-morrow I shall go to see him, and I will come to see you — *in casa sua*." He had never been in the Scotti house. "For the first and last time," he added in a lower key, "and then we can talk — talk of everything we may not say here. Now hasten home, Margherita; I cannot have a tranquil moment knowing you are out alone. Ah!" he cried desperately, "if only I might go with you and see you safely within your door! Go, Signorina."

"To-morrow," she said, "you will surely, surely come?"

"To-morrow, without fail, if I die for it."

She turned and left him, and when she was gone, he threw himself upon the stones in front of the altar and cried out in the agony of his soul: "*Madonna mia santissima*, have pity upon me!" He lay prone on the floor in his misery. Too late he realized that he had sacrificed his youth and signed his own death-warrant, the death of all the joys the world had to give, joys his by right of birth and for which nature had made him; freedom, wealth, love, and in his thoughtless and tender years he had cast them away without a pang. He now understood what the old Prince had meant by asking his forgiveness when dying, "*for not having taken more interest in a fatherless boy*," and suddenly the scales seemed to drop from his eyes and he saw the suave, plausible Marchese Pallavicino and his own mother in their true light. She, an unnatural, soulless woman, who had put away her only child in obscurity and had plotted with her husband to obtain that child's inheritance.

Fauvel, so clever, so quick to understand, had once hinted as much to him and he had resented it, making excuses for his parents. Now he knew the artist had divined rightly. No wonder his mother for years had devised all sorts of reasons for not seeing him; it was her guilty conscience. And now that he

had come to manhood she could not face him. The loyal devotion he had always borne her died in his heart then and there and in its place came exceeding bitterness. He rose with the slowness of old age; his face, wet with tears, was streaked with the dust of the stone floor, and left the chapel. Looking carefully about to see that he was not watched or followed, he picked up a candle, and made his way through the rambling old buildings down into the unused sub-cellar, that for years had been his playroom, his sanctum, his very own.

Hastily removing the débris that concealed the entrance, he descended the few steps and stood for the last time upon that rich marble floor where once Cæsar had stood, and lighted the lamp he kept there. He lifted the disc of lapis-lazuli that hid his treasures; he unfolded the woolen cloth that covered them, and first of all taking up the locket that held the miniature of his mother, he flung it upon the marble floor and ground it beneath the heavy sole of his sandalled foot. The gold, the glass and the exquisite face painted upon the frail ivory, were at once reduced to fragments. Then kneeling down he made a pile of all the letters of Margherita that had found their way here from the private post in the chestnut tree. He touched a match to them, the flames consumed them and the smoke curled up the columns of Numidian marble and disappeared among the blurred frescoes of the domed ceiling. When all the sparks had died out he gathered up the ashes into a sheet of paper and folding it with much care, laid it in the cloth. Next he took up a small gray glove and pressed it to his lips again and again, then reverently placed it beside the little package of ashes. Yes, he must leave it. Some day, ten years from now, if he lived, he would come back and look at it.

He carefully replaced the stone and trod upon it; it sank into place, and no one would know that it had ever been lifted.

The little wingless statue of Love smiled at him from its niche as it had smiled for two thousand years.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE ROSARY

My soul nor deigns nor dares complain  
Though grief and passion there rebel;  
I only know we loved in vain —  
I only feel — Farewell! — Farewell!

BYRON.

It was Sunday. Rome had again resumed her ordinary aspect. The revolt had been nipped in the bud and the city was once more restored to peace and order.

"The last time, the last time," Margaret said to herself, as the maid appeared at her door and announced, "*Un Signore Frate.*" \*

The Scotti mother and daughter had gone to Trastevere for the afternoon and she was alone. On the threshold of the shabby parlor she paused — was there anything more cruel than "Good-bye" — a good-bye like this: hopeless, final? Estori came forward to meet her and took both her hands. He looked better than yesterday and had more self-control. For a moment neither of them said a word, but each saw in the other's eyes a breaking heart. He was the first to speak.

"I have just come from Fauvel," he began; "he tells me he is soon going to attend a congress of artists in Florence, so he and I may meet again. We are to visit Franciscan Houses in the different cities on our way up to Genoa; our steamer will sail from there early in June."

This was said in a voice that tried to be cheerful, and then they sat down. They talked over Margaret's affairs and she explained that though her mother sometimes sent her a little money, she knew that she denied herself to do it, and felt that

\* "A Gentleman Monk."

she ought not to take it. And Estori groaned in his inability to help her.

"Oh," she sighed, "I do not mind poverty if I could only be near you!"

He had his arm about her; they had no thought of impropriety, they loved each other and were about to part forever. "Yes," she continued, "I would sell flowers as the peasants do and be willing to live in some ruin if I could only be near you."

He drew her closer to him. How sweet her words sounded! *Ah, Dio*, if only — "Listen," he said suddenly, "what was that?"

"I do not hear anything," Margaret replied. "The family are out and the maid is away off in the kitchen."

"I thought I heard footsteps, but perhaps not. Ah, dearest, I have not even a ruin to offer you," and he thought with anguish of the many unused rooms in his own father's house, closed against him. "If I had anything to leave you," he continued, "I could go with only half the heartache I feel now, or if Donna Bianca were here she would be a mother to you for my sake. Ah, Margherita, *mia*, I can only leave you in charge of God and the angels." He gave a deep sigh; how far away God and the angels seemed!

"There is Fauvel," he went on; "he will be a friend to you; trust him, he is kind and generous, though he has some queer ideas. He and I were speaking of you just now — listen," he said again, "surely some one is outside." Margaret rose and opened a door standing ajar which led into a passage. "You are mistaken, there is no one here." She sat down again and he put his arm around her as before. "When I am gone," he continued, "Fauvel will tell you something which I have arranged with him. There is a little money due me for some verses I wrote. It is so little," he added, flushing, "but it is all I have that is mine, and I want you to get something with it to remember me by. No, do not say you will not take it," as Margaret shook her head; "that hurts me so! If I were not

wearing this habit you would give me the right to provide you with everything, *non e ver?*” \*

“ Oh!” she cried, clasping her arms about his neck, “ I cannot bear it, Leone! When I think of what we might have been — and then — and then you talk as one talks who is about to die!”

“ And so I am,” he said, “ dying to all that makes life dear to me,” and he looked at her tenderly.

“ But I have taken some solemn vows, and there would be nothing but disgrace and dishonor for me” — then his tone changed to one of passionate longing: “ Ah, *molta amata*, can you suppose I have not thought it all over, day and night, night and day? If I had anywhere to take you, or any means of supporting you, perhaps the temptation might be too strong.”

He loved her with all the strength of his ardent nature and the contact of her soft, slight form yielding to his embrace made his pulses beat and the young blood rush madly through his veins; but this very love kept her sacred in his mind, something to be revered and shielded, for his heart was pure and his senses were restrained by his will.

“ God’s ways seem strange, carissima,” he continued thoughtfully; “ Fauvel believes that God intends all his creatures to be happy. He says that you and I were made to stand in the ‘sunshine of life.’ Fauvel is a fine man, but he has peculiar maxims, not what we have been taught. We know that God has created some living things for the light and others for the shade, and so I think it must be like this in the lives of some of his people, and you and I, Margherita, are among those perhaps who are meant for the shade of this world until we meet in the great light of the next, to part no more.”

He rose, and she knew their hour had come, the terrible “ Good-bye ” must be said. He seemed to her more manly than she had ever seen him, to have grown suddenly older, like one who has fought a battle with himself and conquered. He took

\* *Is it not true?*

her in his arms and kissed her, then tried to disengage hers that were tight around his neck. But she would not let him go; it was just one more embrace and then another and still another. The tears were streaming unrestrained down her face. He realized that he must have the strength for both.

"*Carissima*," he said, "I *must* go. I had other calls to make, but I have spent all my time with you. Come with me once more to San Marco, and we will say the rosary together for each other, and when we come to the end I will leave you there in God's keeping. It will be easier so."

She went into her room and put on her hat, then together they descended the stairs and went out into the street, he going first and she following, as usual. How different this walk from the former ones. He did not turn back and smile, but walked straight on, across the Piazza Barbarini, down the Via Tritone, avoiding the Corso and taking a shorter route, past the Fountain of Trevi, until they reached the Piazza Venezia, and turning behind it, entered the old church so full of memories. Without speaking, he dipped his hand in the holy water font and turning for one moment, touched her fingers; then going to a side chapel, the tomb of a Cardinal, he knelt and Margaret knelt beside him. Though it was not the day nor the season for reciting the "Five Sorrowful Mysteries," yet he chose them and taking up his rosary, kissed the cross and began the first prayer.

"*Ave Maria, gratias plena*," and Margaret responded, "*Ora pro nobis* — pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death."

Her voice was very low, but his was firm and steady.

They finished the first decade and went on from the second to the third. As each bead dropped through her fingers it was like a precious thing she was giving away which she longed to keep herself, for every bead with its prayer brought her nearer to the end. Only a few moments more and the soft musical voice, which she loved better than life, in all probability would

never again fall upon her ear. She could scarcely articulate for the sobs she was trying to repress, and as she finished each sentence, "at the hour of our death," she was beseeching Heaven that that hour might soon come and the agony of parting be not for long.

The fourth decade was completed and he had begun on the fifth and last, "The Crucifixion." A faintness crept over her, his voice sounded far away, she thought she was dying. There were six more beads — she could never have the power to finish them; when the rosary was all said she would scream, she would fling herself at his feet and cling to him and refuse to let him go. Now only four more, now three. She grew weaker and weaker and her responses came slower and slower. He glanced towards her for a second and their eyes met. Summoning the last shreds of her will, she raised her voice — "*Ora pro nobis nunc,*" — then suddenly stopped, the rosary fell from her hands — "Go now," she cried. "Oh, my love, go now — now!"

He rose without another look or word of farewell and turned from her. She heard his soft footfalls receding, then the church door close. It was like the first shovelful of earth falling on the coffin-lid of the one nearest to our hearts. She sank down, her head falling heavily upon the marble rail, as still as death.

She must have stayed there a long time; the sun was shining and the birds singing when they had entered; now it was almost dark. The only light was the sanctuary lamp that shone like a blood-red ruby in the shadowy gloom. Some one touched her shoulder; it was the sacristan: "We are closing the church for the night, Signorina." She stumbled to her feet, groped her way out and staggered home in the twilight like one drunk. She went straight to her room, undressed, and crept into bed. When the Signora Scotti came and begged to know if she were ill, or if she would have supper, she answered that she only wanted to be alone. And the Signora left her, unable to comprehend the way of foreigners, for Margaret had made no moan or complaint; *she only wanted to be alone with her crushing grief.*

## CHAPTER XII

### LEFT ALONE

What I love best in all the world  
Is a castle, precipice-encurled,  
In a gash of the wind-griev'd Apennines.

ROBERT BROWNING.

It was blazing hot on the Spanish Steps in the high glare of noon, but in the old Medici Gardens above on the Pincian Hill where the foliage was so dense that the sunshine merely filtered through, it was cool. Fauvel had had business all the morning at the French Academy and had sought these shades for a respite from the heat before going to luncheon. He took off his hat of Tuscan straw and wiped his forehead with his handkerchief. It was now the first of June, the weather was becoming intensely warm, and he congratulated himself that he had only a week more before leaving Rome, not to return until autumn.

He leaned against one of the moss-grown posts of Hermes and used his hat for a fan, and longed for that mountain haunt of his, where the soft summer winds were perfumed with pine and syringa, and cooled from the snowy peaks of the Apennines. And yet it would be intolerably lonely without his friend Gastonet who had died last winter. They had loved Rocca Serrata and not minded the loneliness; its superb scenery, invigorating air, and picturesqueness were ample compensations for its lack of society, and they had enjoyed shutting themselves away from the modern world for several weeks each year in this half-ruined mediæval castle.

But Gastonet was gone, and Fauvel knew that his place would be hard to fill. Very few of his friends could endure the isolation for more than a week. They had advised him to sell it, but *this* Fauvel did not feel inclined to do. He would travel

through Umbria this summer and see the works of Giotto and Perugini, and would make the castle his headquarters. Perhaps when he visited Florence to attend the congress of artists he might run across some kindred spirit who would enjoy its seclusion and quiet, whom he might carry off to his beloved eerie.

He intended to make a point of seeing Estori while in Florence; they would both be there about the same time, and he did not mean to let the boy slip through his fingers without having given him a few sittings. He believed it would not be difficult to induce him, if he used a certain persuasive argument that had been in his mind ever since hearing that the young monk was to be hurried off to a land about as far away from his own country as they could send him.

Fauvel had not much tolerance for monasticism. Of course one must respect the scholarly Benedictines, the active Dominicans and the self-sacrificing Capuchins; but the minor Franciscans, especially, he deemed lazy and lax, their aim pointless, as far as he could judge, and their "*métier*" indefinite. The Order had deteriorated since the days of its holy founder. How he would like to wrench Estori from this unnatural life! But how to do it? Fra Felice with his childlike guilelessness, his strength of will and his religious nature, had proved incorruptible, and he knew that any attempt on his own part to alter the inside workings of the religious houses in Rome with their far-reaching policies, would be like tapping against the rock of Gibraltar.

The cannon from Sant' Angelo boomed the midday hour. He set his watch by it, put on his hat and left the gardens.

Walking along the Via Sistina, he met a friend who asked if he were going to the concert to be given that night at the Costanzi. Fauvel had been out at Tivoli for ten days and the concert had slipped his mind entirely; though he had subscribed for a box he had not even made up his party. Inviting Count Cassani on the spot, on reaching home he hastily sent out a note

to Madame Tardieu, and another to Mademoiselle Randolph.

When Margaret received hers, she felt too broken-hearted to accept, and she had not seen Fauvel since Estori left; but life has to be lived, and the Signora Scotti urged her to go, saying that the King and Queen would be there and all the great ladies of Rome, and for what was that beautiful white gown lying idle in the wardrobe?

The gown to which the Signora referred was of soft, shimmering white embroidered in silver thread, and that evening as Margaret brought out each article of apparel that went with it, there were ejaculations of delight from the Scottis who were helping her dress. The white slippers spangled in silver, the silk stockings, fine as a cobweb, the lace petticoat, the fan, and the long white wrap with a ruche of tulle at the neck, and lastly a triple-strand necklace of seed pearls that Cousin Cornelia had given her on her eighteenth birthday.

"You are like a *principissa*, Signorina," they both exclaimed when, the toilet completed, she stood in the parlor waiting for Fauvel, and as he entered his eyes swept admiringly over her, from the prettily arranged hair to the small slippered feet. She noticed the glance and blushed slightly.

"You look very lovely to-night, Mademoiselle," he said, as he escorted her to the carriage in which Madame Tardieu was seated, and they were driven away to the Teatro Costanzi. The opera house presented a brilliant scene. The box in which the King and Queen sat was draped with the royal flags, and the auditorium was filled with the aristocracy who had remained in town for the event. There were flashing of diamonds and waving of fans, and the bare necks and shoulders of fair women gleamed white against the black broadcloth of Roman princes.

Fauvel watched Margaret as she sat beside Count Cassani; he had often declared that only one woman in a thousand had a right to wear pearls and she could do it. Though with the eyes of the artist he could see her only fair, with the eyes of the physician he could see that she was not well. That extreme white-

ness was an unnatural pallor, her movements were languid, and she replied listlessly to the remarks of Cassani.

"She is breaking her heart for Estori," Fauvel said to himself, "and it is affecting her health," and he recalled the pathetic scene he had unintentionally witnessed. Fauvel would have scorned eavesdropping, but that Sunday afternoon when Estori had made him a farewell visit the latter had said nothing of his intention of going next door afterward, and Fauvel wishing to speak to Signora Scotti had crossed over the adjoining balconies, and finding no one, had followed the sound of voices in the parlor just in time to see Margaret throw her arms about Estori and hear her say she did not mind poverty or loneliness if she might only be near him, that she loved him enough to live in a ruin for his sake. It was not until he had heard his own name mentioned, "trust Fauvel," that he had realized what he was doing; then he had fled. He wondered what was to become of her. It would be dreadful should she be taken ill practically alone, and with her slender means. She could never take care of herself, she was too refined and retiring to push her way through life and fight the world for a living; the world would turn and crush her in her attempt.

There was of course the other way. He knew plenty of decent fellows who would be glad enough to take her under their protection. She would do credit to any man. But he had studied her for weeks and knew that she would never in cold blood accept such terms; she, like Estori, might break where she would not bend.

When Fauvel bade her good night at the top of the stairs he inquired about her health, and she replied that she was well enough, only "tired all the time;" then she thanked him for the pleasure of the evening, and the Signora Scotti, sleepy, candle in hand, took in the white girl in the white gown.

Margaret in these days was just existing. She had allowed herself to fall in love with Estori, and had gone on in a wonderful secret happiness, stifling her conscience, without giving a

thought to the future, or a sudden parting. If she had listened to that "still, small voice," she would have been spared the heartache of to-day.

The Contessa Melzi had sent word for her to call at the end of the week. Margaret was feeling particularly depressed as she sat waiting in the little private reception room of the contessa, for she had just come from saying good-by to Madame Tardieu and the boys who were leaving that night. Another member of the quartette to go; now there was only herself and Fauvel left, and in a few days he too would be gone. Well, she could not get away from Rome too soon, and the one light spot on her dark horizon was the prospect of Switzerland.

The moment the contessa entered, Margaret felt a disappointment in store for her. The Signora had changed her plans — was not coming and would not need her services. The contessa regretted extremely that Mademoiselle's expectations should not be fulfilled and said it was the last time she should ever make arrangements for other people — as always something miscarried, and she strongly advised Margaret to go home to America. The awful truth was that her funds were at an end. She had managed so carefully that she had just enough to keep her until next week, when this arrangement was to have begun and her expenses to cease.

It seemed as if there were nothing but to go home. She stopped at the different steamer offices, finding the first cabin prices were more than she could pay and her pride rebelled against going second class. After the twentieth, they told her, the rates would drop. In the meantime she must lessen her expenses at the Scottis' in some way. A few days after this the Signora Scotti dropped in to speak to Fauvel. She was worried, she said, about the Signorina, and he inquired as to what was wrong. She told him first of all that the Signorina had given up taking her meals with them and had asked that her table board might be deducted from her weekly bill.

"Where does she go for her meals?" he asked.

"*Signore mio!* She does not take any at all."

"Does not eat at all? Absurd! You must be mistaken, my good friend."

"All she takes is tea and crackers," the woman insisted. "I see her make the tea in her room on a little spirit lamp and she keeps a box of *biscotti* on her shelf, and she cries much."

Fauvel was very thoughtful after Signora Scotti left, and later he wrote a note to Margaret asking if she would stop in at the studio the next afternoon and see him on a little matter of business. He knew that if he called upon her he would not be free to say what he wished, as the Scotti women always seemed to think it their duty to come and entertain him as well.

It was several days now since Margaret had eaten solid food and she was hungry all the time. Again and again she would count over the remainder of her money to see if she could spare just a franc to buy some dried fish, eggs, or any little thing to help with the crackers, but each time concluded she dared not do it. When she walked out in the cool of the late afternoons she would stop and gaze into the windows of the tea rooms and cafés, where the delicious cakes and *brioche*s were displayed so temptingly, and how could the beggars guess, when she refused them a coin, that the Signorina in the pretty summer costume was as hungry as themselves.

She went often to see old Assunta, and once had found her baking her black bread and had become so interested that the old woman timidly offered her a loaf, which she had gladly accepted; she went away clasping the still warm bread, done up in newspaper and that evening served it on her lonely little supper table, instead of the crackers.

It was Giacinta's day for visiting her, and while brushing out Margaret's long, thick hair, the woman told her how glad she was she had decided to go home, though she should miss her greatly. "Have I not always said," Giacinta continued, "that you are too young to be alone *così?*" Giacinta had a protecting feeling in her heart for the little lonely "*Americana*," so she

chatted on: "Something tells me that it will not be long before a young Signore *bravissimo* will take you to a beautiful home, and remember that Giacinta is to come and live with you, Signorina *mia?*"

"I shall never marry," Margaret answered, in a small, pathetic voice, "but if it is ever possible I will send for you, dear, dear Giacinta," and she arose and put her arms around the woman's neck, and kissed her motherly face.

As Giacinta was leaving Romilla Scotti entered and placed two letters upon the bed; one was in Fauvel's handwriting, the other in Josephine's. Margaret opened her sister's first.

*Dear Margaret:*

Mother is very ill. Do not be alarmed, it is just a bad case of nervous prostration. She is now in a Sanitarium, and it looks as if it might be weeks before she regains her strength. Dr. Parkham says she must give up all idea of ever going back to her position; and Phil, who has always objected to her doing anything, insists upon her making her home with us in future.

Of course you understand that I really could not ask him to do anything for you, so it is most fortunate that you are away, and able to take care of yourself. If I had anything of my own I would be glad to help you, but I have nothing except what my husband gives me, and you could have had a richer husband than mine, you poor, misguided child. Worry over you has helped to bring on mother's illness, so for heaven's sake don't write home any troubles. I'm so glad you're going to have a summer in Switzerland. I hope it will do you lots of good and that you will 'make good.'

Mother has had to give up her apartment and I am having the furniture sold, it will help to pay a few of her debts, so you see there's no place for you to come to —

Margaret could read no more. She was appalled by the news. Alarmed for her mother, and that now she had no home, but was at the end of her resources and had nowhere in the world to go! She was confronted suddenly with the frightful proposition that she must live without anything to live upon. Oh, why had she ever come to Italy, or, worse still, why had she let Estori go without trying to keep him? They had both accepted his fate so easily; they should have fought it. Oh, the

horror of having not a soul to turn to! If Cousin Cornelia really knew the dreadful straits she was in, would she be so hard-hearted? Should she dare venture to appeal to her? No, no; for in one of Josephine's former letters she had said: "Remember, you undertook to 'paddle your own canoe,' and Cousin Cornelia has no further use for you." Wallace Grant, after the broken engagement, had written her: "I believe I shall always love you, and should you ever need me as a friend, call upon me." But no, no, neither could she appeal to him; under the circumstances she would rather be dead than drag her pride in the dust like that! If she only could die — how sweet death would be to-day, just to go to sleep with no awakening to heartache, hunger and homelessness! "Oh, Leone," she cried, "why are you not here to help me! You would have thought and planned for me, so that I might help myself." All her assistance had come through him, and he had gotten her pupils through Fauvel, Fauvel — she had forgotten to read his note.

Tearing it open nervously, she scanned it. She would see what he wanted. She slipped on a dress and ran next door. She found the place in disorder; pictures turned with their faces to the wall and the canvases on the easels covered with sheets. The door was open into the luxurious "lounge" and she could see that this room also was dismantled and his man in there packing. The artist was preparing for his departure.

Fauvel was shocked at Margaret's appearance. She had grown thin in the last few days, he thought. She was white as the linen dress she wore, and her fine, arched eyebrows looked more like pencil strokes than ever upon the whiteness of her forehead. Her expression puzzled him; it was a mixture of dread, hopelessness, and despair. She sank into the offered chair as if she were weary in body and mind.

"Mademoiselle," he said, closing the door that led into the adjoining room where his servant was at work, "I am going away, as you know, and will be in Florence for the next ten days; afterwards I shall be in Perugia, and I want to give you

the address of my bankers there, who will receive my mail through the summer. I hope you will let me hear from you and that if I can be of any service you will allow me that privilege. But before I go — is there anything I can do for you now? ”

She thanked him faintly. “No,” she said; “no, nothing, unless you know of some pupils, or some position I could take.”

“Unfortunately,” he replied, “I do not. Every one is leaving the city who can possibly do so, and until autumn, Mademoiselle, there will be only transients and tourists here.”

Then there was a pause. She wanted to tell him of the desperate situation into which she was suddenly thrown and ask his advice, but it would make her feel like an outcast to admit that there was nobody — nobody to whom she had a right to turn. She tried to speak, but words stuck in her throat.

Fauvel broke the pause by asking how much longer she was going to stay in Rome. She replied that she did not know exactly.

“I understood from Signora Scotti,” he said, “that you were arranging to return to the United States.”

A look of pain passed over her face. “I — I cannot go just yet —”

“Once when I was quite young and away from home,” he continued, “my remittance did not come when expected, and I borrowed from a friend. If that is the case with you, Mademoiselle, will you not let me advance you, until it comes from your family? ”

The blood suddenly rushed to her face, dyeing it crimson, then left her deathly pale; the white lips began to tremble, the dark eyes filled with tears and in another instant she had thrown herself over the arm of the chair and was shaking with sobs.

“Mademoiselle, *ma chère*,” he exclaimed, “what have I said? What is the matter? Tell me what it is, you can trust

me, surely," then he added gently: "I want to help you; Fra Felice would trust me."

But at the mention of that name she only sobbed more piteously. Fauvel kindly but firmly insisted upon her drinking a glass of some restorative cordial. It soothed her overstrained nerves, and then he learned that her mother was seriously ill, her home was broken up, her sister would do nothing for her, and that she had been disappointed in the position upon which she had staked her all. She had only money enough left to pay for a room a week or two longer — there was no question of a remittance from America, and she must — she *must* find some means of support.

Again he begged her to accept a loan. She had never borrowed money in her life she said. He told her that later in the summer he would have some money which belonged to her, to be paid him by the magazine that had bought Estori's verses, and which the latter had charged him to give to her; she could return it then if her circumstances permitted; he was not particular as to when he should be reimbursed. He insisted upon her taking a two-hundred-lire note, and said she would hear from him shortly, that he would interest himself to see that she was provided for, but that she must take care of her health, and she *must* eat.

Then he sent his man out for hot chicken and vegetables, and good red wine, and they had a picnic supper together in the dismantled room, and a little color came back to her pale cheeks and lips.

After he went with her down to her own door he lighted a cigar and walked in the direction of the Porta Pia, and out on the Via Nomentana to breathe fresher air, and do some thinking. He could not leave Margherita to starve, yet it was difficult to know just what to do in circumstances like hers. However, his brain was fertile, his hand free and his purse full, and he had solved greater problems than this.

*The next morning Margaret looked from the parlor window*

and saw Fauvel get into the cab that stood waiting. It was piled with his luggage and the great brass cage with the macaw was on the seat beside him. He waved good-bye to her until the cab turned the corner, and then she drew in the blinds to keep out the fierce heat of the sun, and sank down upon the hair-cloth sofa. Her last friend was gone.

**PART II**  
**"THE BELMONTES"**



## CHAPTER XIII

### THE CASTLE IN UMBRIA

Gray ruins loom on every side,  
Each stone an age's story;  
They seem the very ghosts of pride  
That watch the grave of glory.

RYAN.

Ten long hot weary days went by, and Margaret heard nothing from Fauvel; then when she had nearly lost hope a letter had come from him and she had acted upon it promptly, not considering what she was doing until she found herself in the midnight train, steaming out of Rome.

The artist had written that he knew of a position which he thought she could fill, and to come at once to Perugia, where he would meet her. He would explain everything when he saw her; if she found herself dissatisfied or unhappy she would be free to return, with her expenses paid. The letter was registered and contained money for her ticket.

Now that the rush and excitement of sudden leave-taking were over, as she sat in the railway carriage marked *Signore sole* \* with her hat in her lap and her belongings beside her, she had time to reflect. Fauvel had not said what the position was, nor mentioned the name of the family or person with whom she was to live. Had she been rash in obeying the summons; what else was there for her to do? Every friend she had in Rome was gone, and she knew, alas, how limited she was as to work; there seemed only this between her and starvation, but yet — but yet — however, she had done it now, she must face it, whatever it was, and had not Estori told her to “trust Fauvel”?

She dozed off and on through the journey. During her wakeful moments she would shade her eyes from the dim light in the

\* Ladies only.

compartment and look out upon the moonlit country. At dawn she began to grow apprehensive. Suppose Fauvel should fail to meet her — suppose — a thousand things!

But when only a little later the train drew in at the station, there was the familiar blond head and beard that seemed now to belong to her kindest friend, and all fears vanished when he greeted her in his courteous, cordial way. After he had taken her to a hotel and ordered breakfast, he told how he had invited friends to spend the summer with him, at his old castle in the Umbrian mountains. They were to keep house for him and look after his interests while he went off on short trips. He wanted them to be contented, for it was very lonely up there at "Rocca Serrata," and it would be pleasanter for all to have another young person in the house, and he had thought of her. He particularly wished to make the Signor and Signora Belmonte contented, he said; he was fond of them and the Signore was useful to him in his work.

"Am I to be the companion of the Signora?" she asked.

"You are to be my guest; yes, company for us all."

"But there must be some regular duties," Margaret ventured timidly. "You wrote, Monsieur, that you knew of a position I could fill, and although it sounds very delightful and you are always kind, I should not like to accept your hospitality unless I could make myself useful!"

"The duties will arrange themselves, Mademoiselle, when you are settled. Do not let that worry you. I know your circumstances and am trying to plan and provide for you in what appears to me the best way; and remember I also wrote that if everything should not prove satisfactory you will be free to go; but I believe you will be happy," and that strange, unreadable expression she had noticed in Rome was upon his face. "And now," he added, "you must take another egg, as we have a long drive ahead. I have had some luncheon put up, for we cannot get anything fit to eat on the way." She asked hesitatingly if he *had seen Fra Felice!*

"Yes, in Florence," he answered.

"How did he look?"

"Badly, badly."

Margaret turned her face away so that he might not see the tears that started.

"Do you know when his ship is to sail?" she asked again.

"On Saturday."

On Saturday, and this was Tuesday! There were three more days in which she could still reach him; if she only had the money and independence to go, she would cling to him, she would entreat him not to leave her. The knowledge that he was still in Italy, where she could not see him or write to him, made it all the harder to bear; when he was once out of the country, irrevocably gone, perhaps it would be easier. Ah, why had not fate ordered that Fauvel was to take her to Genoa, instead of to his old castle? — oh, she must think of something else, quick, quick, before her tears should fall. The place to which she was going came first to her mind. "Is Rocca Ser-rata far from here?" she asked.

"Not so far in actual miles," he replied, "but it is inaccessible and away from the railroad. I have a strong coach built purposely for mountain travel; it will be here at ten o'clock."

When Margaret was seated in the stout, comfortable conveyance with its heavy brakes, her two trunks strapped on behind with some boxes and packages belonging to Fauvel, she felt as if another chapter in her life were about to begin.

They soon left Perugia behind and were striking out into what is known as the great Umbrian plain. It was a perfect summer day. The grass was full of wild flowers and there were whole meadows of pink and white clover. Further on was a long stretch of vineyards, where the vines even climbed the trunks of great oaks, and the ground was thick with broom and mignonette, and beyond were acres of wheat dotted with scarlet poppies.

In about an hour's time the road, hedged with hawthorne bushes, began to ascend; wild roses crept up the sides of the hill along which they were traveling; they reached the top, descended into a shady valley, and rose again. They seemed to be passing over a rolling sea of verdure, and beyond the mountains loomed high, bare and majestic, while upon almost every summit was a battlemented town or fortress.

"How lovely this is!" Margaret exclaimed. "And the air, how fresh it has become — so different from Rome!"

"It will be quite cool before our drive is over," Fauvel said, "when we are really in the mountains; we are only skirting the foothills now."

Every few miles they came to a small, dirty town, apparently forgotten by the world. The whole population turned out to gape at them as they drove along its principal street or watered their horses at the mediæval fountain of its *piazza*.

Soon there was a decided change in the aspect of the landscape. The vineyards, olive groves and fertile plains disappeared, and instead of the hawthorn and wild rose that hedged the roads, there were boulders of dark volcanic rock, the mountains gathered in more and more closely, the country becoming wilder with every mile, and here and there a lofty snow-capped peak glistened in the sunshine.

Margaret had been very quiet. What would her family say if they could see her journeying all alone with a Belgian artist, and an Italian driver who looked like a cut-throat? Had she done an imprudent, shocking thing? Surely, surely Fauvel was all right. Madame Tardieu had known him for years, she had always heard him well spoken of, and had he not been kindness itself to her?

A pinnacle of rock loomed up in front of them, casting a dark shadow over everything. She shivered slightly; there was an awesome feeling in these vast heights. The road wound around the base of the rock, then began to ascend gradually. The

horses now felt the burden they were drawing, for the driver was urging them on in surly tones.

It was just the spot, Margaret thought, for brigands in these clefts and gorges to jump out and seize them. She suggested this to Fauvel, who smiled and said he had traveled over this road for five seasons and had never had any disturbance. "Besides, you know the *caribonieri* patrol the country day and night, and I am armed as well," showing her a revolver. "Would Mademoiselle enjoy an adventure?"

"No, no," she answered. She felt she was having adventure enough.

Up and up they went. What had looked to her like bare mountain sides from a distance she now saw were covered with a dense forest growth.

After her night's journey and the long ride she leaned back drowsily; Fauvel wrapped a shawl about her and before she knew it she was asleep. She was awakened by a touch, and he pointed ahead of them. Set high above, upon a lonely bluff, she saw the massive towers and crenelated walls of a great castle, commanding the valley with its mighty keep.

"Rocca Serrata," he said.

"Oh, how beautiful! how beautiful!" she exclaimed.

The castle stood like a crown upon a crag of the bluff, which jutted out from a stupendous rock; so sharp, so high, so pointed that it seemed to pierce the sky.

They were approaching it by a rough steep slope curving around a forlorn hamlet, crouched in a hollow of the rock as if in fear of its damp, dark shadow. An old woman sat in a doorway spinning, a herdsman was driving his goats through the muddy street, and pigs and chickens went in and out of the wretched dwellings quite as much at home as the dirty children playing before them. When they neared the crest of the hill the unwholesome shades gave place to sunshine and bloom.

Now they were turning into a road between surrounding

walls broken through in many places, giving glimpses of old gardens and terraces within.

"Oh, how beautiful!" Margaret repeated, straightening herself and sitting up to get a better view, while she drew in with deep draughts the pure sweet air. "I have read of such places, but I never thought I should *really, really* live in one."

Rocca Serrata, though imposing from a distance, upon closer inspection was crumbling and ruinous. Half of the northern tower had fallen, and the débris lay below, overgrown with vines and weeds; other portions were mouldering and dilapidated, but its sub-structure of huge blocks of volcanic stone was made to defy time. The entrance did not face the valley, but the rock behind it, which in reality was an eighth of a mile away, though from some points of view it appeared as if the castle were built right out in front of it. Yet when the light fell directly from above and all contrasts of brightness and shadow were merged in a sunny haze, the castle sank into the towering rock and was almost obliterated. Only in the morning when the sun shone full upon it, or towards evening as its slanting rays touched the mountain side beyond it, did it come again into prominence.

The road between the walls ended before massive feudal gates of iron, standing hospitably open and rusting upon their hinges; through them they drove into a broad paved court enclosed by the same high walls. There was an arched passage with a portcullis, a filled-in moat, and an oaken door heavily studded with spiked nails, huge bolts and a knocker. Beside the door upon a stone bench an unkempt boy sat dozing.

"Welcome to Rocca Serrata, Mademoiselle," Fauvel said as they alighted, while the boy came shuffling over the flags, giving an awkward bow to the *padrone*, and a nod of recognition to the driver whom he proceeded to help with the luggage.

Margaret felt a flutter of nervousness, for presently she should meet the Belmontes; would they like her, she wondered, and would she like them? They entered a long, empty room

entirely of stone, paved in the same rough way as the courtyard and blackened by the smoke of torches clamped into the walls. No one was to be seen except an old man holding a bunch of ponderous keys; he was bowing low.

"Well, Clemente," Fauvel began, "have you arranged the apartments as I directed, and has Lisa made everything comfortable?"

"Yes, *Illustrissima*, yes," he replied; "everything is prepared."

"Come, Mademoiselle," said Fauvel, and Margaret followed, Clemente leading the way.

The silence of the place was grewsome; not a sound was to be heard except their own footfalls over the cement flooring and the metallic rattle of the old man's keys. It seemed to her as if centuries must have rolled by since any one had walked over the cracked and sunken pavement of these corridors, where cobwebs clung to the vaulted ceilings, and the light coming in through narrow slit windows, showed of what tremendous thickness the walls were made.

They ascended a stair worn with the feet of many generations, and turned down another corridor which was lighter and more airy, round-arched instead of vaulted, and oddly frescoed with the signs of the zodiac. It also appeared not quite so ancient, cleaner and in better repair. There were doors on either side; one of them was open, and before it they stopped.

Fauvel motioned Margaret to enter; then he dismissed Clemente, telling him to send Lisa.

But Margaret stood on the threshold, and turned to him. "The Belmontes," she said, "where are they?"

"You will meet them to-night at dinner; enter, Mademoiselle."

"Monsieur," she began, "I do not understand. You have been kind to me — oh, so very kind, but there seems to be no one here but you and me, and your old servant."

"There might be five hundred here, Mademoiselle, and you

need never know it, this house is so big; there are accommodations for a score of prisoners alone, in the dungeons far below." He pointed downward with one hand and with the other again motioned her to enter.

She smiled faintly, saying: "I hope there are no poor prisoners down there now."

"Not in the dungeons," he answered; "though as a matter of fact there is a prisoner in the house."

"That sounds interesting, and terrible both, Monsieur. I did not know that private individuals had the right to keep prisoners nowadays!"

"They have not, but in these parts a good deal of the old feudal law obtains. The owner of the estate is still lord and ruler to a large extent. Perhaps it would interest you to help this one escape."

"Perhaps," Margaret answered, in a voice slightly strained.

This reception at the castle was not very encouraging, and in spite of Fauvel's smiling face and courteous manner she felt disconcerted and apprehensive.

"I see you are not in the humor for jests, Mademoiselle," he said; "also that you are fatigued. I beg you will rest and refresh yourself. We will not dine until eight o'clock. You will have time for sleep. I have sent for Lisa to wait upon you, and bring you some tea; your trunks will be here directly — and, Mademoiselle, will you do me a favor? I have arranged a little *festa* for to-night, and I should like to have you wear the same white dress you wore to the concert at the *Cos-tanzi* in Rome, will you?"

"Certainly, Monsieur, if you request it."

Then Fauvel left her.

She entered the room and glanced around. It was a spacious apartment, with an old-time dignity about its tarnished gilt cornices and faded draperies, its long oak chests that looked like coffins, and its mirrored wardrobe. It had a musty odor in spite of the fine, dry air that was blowing in through the

open windows, but on the whole it pleased her and, oh — blissful thought, no board bill would be presented for it!

She hoped the Belmontes' rooms were near by. It would be awful to stay at night all alone in this "spooky" place, and sleep in that formidable four-post bed decked with moth-eaten plumes, that reminded her of a hearse. Fortunately there was a bell-cord with a fat, threadbare tassel. How delightful it would be if Madame Tardieu were a guest here also, and — and that other one who was set apart — who —

She gazed out of the window upon the vast stretch of mountains, and a wave of heartsickness and loneliness took possession of her, as she thought of how *he* would soon be upon the vast ocean, sailing farther and farther away, without even leaving her a hope of ever seeing him again.

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE MOON-LIT STAIR

There is no love like my loving;  
New bathed in the fount of truth,  
Heart baring and hand ungloving,  
In the passionate pledge of youth,  
I move in the dream-light splendor  
Of a soul to ecstasy stung—  
An ardor, a wild surrender  
None know but the young, the young!

L. B. EDWARDS.

After having bathed and slept Margaret felt refreshed and rested, and Lisa, the wife of Clemente, came to help her dress. Afterwards Lisa had conducted her through a labyrinth of passages, and stairs to where Fauvel was waiting.

He stood inside the door of a once gorgeous saloon, having remnants of velvet and satin hangings, tapestried walls, large double doors with decorated panels, and rich but faded rugs upon the floor. He came forward to meet her, kissing her hand. She was even more attractive, he thought, than on the night at the opera, for then she had worn long gloves, while now her slender, round arms were bare, as well as her pretty neck and shoulders. Her childish face, though still sad, had lost the terrible, anxious expression that had so distressed him in Rome.

"That is a very beautiful gown, Mademoiselle," he said; "its nondescript style makes it suitable for any era and particularly accords with these surroundings; all that is needed now to complete the picture is a young knight at your feet. But tell me, how do you like my mountain retreat?"

"Oh, I like it, I like it!" she said. "I feel as if I were a character in a novel. It is all so strange and beautiful to me, *and yet it must be very old?*"

"The new can always be made to order, but only age can beautify like this. These saloons were done over during the Renaissance, and my poor friend Gastonet bought from dealers and private families old furniture and draperies of that period, so under his able hand they have been made to look as they did originally."

Fauvel was standing in front of an ornate fireplace, in which smouldered a heap of pine-cones. It was the middle of June, but the night air here was often chilly, the ruddy sparks gave a cheerful aspect, also a pleasant, pungent odor. He was glancing lovingly and admiringly around the room, where dozens of wax tapers in gilt sconces furnished the light, casting a mellow glow over the dim and time-worn elegance of the spacious apartment. Margaret also glanced around. The Belmontes were nowhere to be seen, but at one side was a table covered with snowy linen and expensive glass and silverware, which was set for four; that at least was reassuring. Fauvel, the Belmontes and herself were to dine first, she supposed, before the arrival of their guests. She wondered what sort of people he could collect from the neighborhood, which had seemed to her composed only of shepherds' huts and peasants' hovels, but then she had slept as they approached the castle and for all she knew there might be fine villas near them.

"I am having the dinner served in here for your benefit, Mademoiselle," he said. "You Americans like fire at all seasons, I believe, and I want you to be comfortable."

"How kind and thoughtful you are, Monsieur, but perhaps it may be too warm for the Signora," she replied, thinking it odd that Fauvel should consider her tastes before those of the wife of his friend.

"The Signora is of your nationality," he answered.

"Oh," she exclaimed, "I am glad of that! Shall I meet her soon?"

"Soon. But, Mademoiselle, I think you need something after your walk through these long corridors, which are cold

after dark," and he filled two small glasses and handed her one. "We shall drink another toast when the Belmontes come," he said. "This is to you, to Mademoiselle *la rayonnette*, that is what you remind me of — a moonbeam, in your filmy white with its silver tracery."

Margaret took the offered glass and drank it in smiling acknowledgment of the delicate compliment. Fauvel had merely tasted his, when Clemente entered, making a slight sign that he wished to speak privately with his master, so she sat down and glanced about again. There were two objects that especially attracted her attention. One was a large mirror, blurred and cracked, reaching nearly from floor to ceiling. The other was a crimson velvet curtain at the opposite end of the room. She was curious as to what was behind it.

The cordial she had taken had a peculiar effect upon her; it was toning and invigorating, and yet intensely soothing. A great contentment stole over her; it did not appear at all unnatural for her to be sitting here, she was already quite at home in these unusual surroundings. Her thoughts drifted further and further into the past — "the dreadful yet beautiful mediæval past, when life was so strong and fierce, and passions blazed so suddenly to the bad and to the good." Could it be really she, up-to-date Margaret Randolph, from practical common-sense New York, gone back, back into the realms of romance and knighthood?

The conversation between Fauvel and his servant still continued in an undertone. Near her on a marble-topped table with curved gilt legs, stood a crystal bowl filled with red roses; their perfume reached her, fragrant, sweet and subtle. They were like the roses that Estori loved so well, and with the perfume came visions of him. The rich crimson mantling his cheeks, the very color of the flowers themselves, his freshness, his sweetness, his beauty that rivaled the richest rose among them.

*She did not notice that Clemente had left, nor that Fauvel*

was standing as if expecting his guests, for her eyes were riveted upon the mirror — surely, surely it was a mirror — yet now the massive gilt woodwork framed a picture. Oh, had the cordial gone to her head, or had the idea of a young knight that Fauvel had suggested, taken shape in her brain? What was this? It was moving, moving. It was not a picture — the old mirror was only doing its duty and reflecting a reality! She turned her head quickly toward the other end of the room, and saw Fauvel watching her. Was she in a trance, or was she dreaming?

Standing where the crimson curtain had fallen into place behind him was in truth a knight in silk doublet and hose, with a long cloak draped over his shoulders, young, graceful and handsome, with hair as black as the raven's wing and features as perfect as those of a Greek god. He was entirely in white, the only color a red rose against the silken doublet. He stood at the top of three marble steps, with one hand still holding the folds of the curtain through which he had come, silent, immovable, gazing down into the room.

Margaret's heart beat fast; what was there about those dusky curls that was like Estori's? Ah, because — because his image was so photographed upon her mind that she could see nothing but him. The youth was looking at her — staring at her. She rose from her seat, he came down two steps and hesitated, almost staggered, then straightened himself again and passed a hand over his eyes as if to clear his vision.

Margaret moved slightly forward, her whole body swaying like a reed, her hand pressed to her heart to stop its wild beating; then there was a flash of recognition, a cry of ecstatic joy, and forgetful of Fauvel, forgetful of everything, in a moment they were clasped in each others' arms.

"Margherita, Margherita!" he cried, after the first rapturous embrace, "have you dropped from heaven?"

"And you — and you," she murmured, so overcome she could scarcely speak.

"You here — this costume — oh, I cannot understand; where am I? It is a dream — a dream."

"No, no, my treasure, it is not a dream;" he drew her towards him and kissed her; "this is Rocca Serrata, the castle of Fauvel. Fauvel," he cried, "Meurice, where are you?" He looked around; they both looked, but Fauvel was gone.

"I do not understand," Margaret said again, as she sank into a chair; tears rushed to her eyes; she could not breathe; was she going to die of joy?

"Take this, *carissima*," he said, holding to her lips the glass that Fauvel had left. "You have had a shock, and I — I understand no more than you."

"Then you did not know I was coming?"

She had taken a sip of the cordial, and handing the glass back to him, "you finish it," she said, and he drank it down.

"But how did you come here, and in these clothes? I still think I am dreaming."

"I met Fauvel in Florence," Estori answered. "He said if I would come here for a week and be his model he would give me a thousand *lire*. I managed it, never mind how. This costume," he added, glancing half ashamed, half contemptuously at his remarkable attire, "is one Fauvel wore to an artists' *fête* ball in Paris — he and I are about the same size. He has made sketches of me in it, and insisted upon my wearing it to-night, saying a friend had returned with him. I supposed it was another artist as crazy as himself. He went to Perugia yesterday to meet this friend, and I was fearful he might not get back in time for me to reach Genoa promptly, as he promised I should when I consented to come with him, for unless things are carefully managed I will be disgraced forever in my community."

He paused, gazed at Margaret, looked around the room, then back at her. "But I begin to understand," he continued; "Fauvel has brought you here. That is all I can think of now — *that is all I care to think of.*"

At that moment Clemente reëntered, saying:

"The Padrone's salutations to the Signor and Signora Belmonte, and he begs they will excuse his absence at dinner, as he is called suddenly to the village."

"Belmonte!" exclaimed Margaret.

"Hush!" said Estori; "that is the name I am known by, 'Leone Belmonte.'"

"The Belmontes," she said, half to herself; "I was to meet them here. I cannot comprehend anything that is going on, and I am too happy to think or to care," for again the feeling of perfect contentment and peace had stolen over her, and she let Estori lead her to the table without another question.

It was months since she had sat down to an attractive and well-ordered repast. And the wine — how delicious! — clear and sparkling, with the flavor of liquid fruit. When the dessert was brought on the uncouth-looking stable boy appeared at one of the doors and handed Clemente a note, which he in turn handed to Estori. It contained something hard and round. He broke the seal, and inside was the ring he had insisted upon Fauvel's keeping since it so much interested him, the same he had found when a boy embedded in a crack of the marble flooring in the hidden chamber of Cæsar's Palace under the old convent in Rome. Then it had seemed only dull metal, but now it was changed into living gold, fiery and bright, and the unbroken hammered circle Fauvel had said was an emblem of unbroken and eternal love.

The note read:

There has been an accident in the village; my services are needed there. I will not come home to-night. The one thousand *lire* I owe you shall be yours to-morrow. I have tried to arrange everything for the comfort and convenience of my guests. I return you this ancient ring, for I think there is a hand near you that the small circlet may fit. Give this toast for me to the Signor and Signora Belmonte: For the past a remembrance, for the present happiness, for the future hope.

Yours,

MEURICE ANTOINE FAUVEL.

Estori slipped the ring back quickly into the note, the blood mounting hotly to his cheeks. He took up his glass and drained it, after the manner of a man who needs wine. Clemente immediately refilled it.

"What is it," asked Margaret; "is anything wrong?"

"Fauvel sends you his compliments," he replied; "he has gone to the village about three miles off, something has happened there and he goes to relieve suffering. These peasants who live on the mountain know his skill and send for him in their trouble, and he never refuses to go."

At last the dinner was over and the table cleared. Clemente had brought the coffee and when he finally departed, Margaret begged for the explanation: "You met Fauvel in Florence, you said; now tell me everything from that time on."

"Yes," he began, "I did; I and my companions with whom I am to sail were making a pilgrimage at Assisi, and while there my relative, Prince Daniele Estori, joined us, to pray at the shrine of St. Francis, who was the patron saint of his dead father, for the repose of his soul. Daniele asked permission of my Superior to have me spend my last week with him, on his estate at Fiesole, which is near Florence, you know. It was all arranged, and I was to rejoin my companions in Genoa at the Franciscan Convent of the Visitation where those of my Order who are to leave Italy will meet the day after to-morrow. But we went first to Florence where Daniele had business, and I took the time for sightseeing while he was with his lawyers. By appointment at the Uffizi Gallery, I met Fauvel. He told me, Margherita, that you were starving in Rome, actually starving."

"It is true," she said very quietly, "I was."

"He said that your home in New York had been broken up, that you were disappointed about that position for the summer, that you had no money and nowhere to go. You may imagine how I felt, what I suffered at hearing this, I — who was powerless to help you and yet would give my life for you!"

"Dear Leone," she said, raising her eyes to his and seeing in them all the truth of his words, "I believe you would."

"He told me also of the danger that threatened you, *carissima*; dangers to which any young and unprotected girl is exposed, things I cannot speak to you about — they are too awful — and yet I know they are true. The men of Rome are bloodhounds — bloodhounds, some of them, and even Fauvel was not there to watch over you."

Margaret turned her face away. "I begged him to see if there was anything we could do to help you, he and I together, and he said that money was the best safeguard for a woman. But how was I to get money? Then he proposed that I should come here with him for a week and pose as a model in any costume he might choose; he could finish the pictures from memory, he said, and would give me a thousand *lire* which I could send to you."

"Oh," she gasped. Her face was still averted and her hands tightly clasped.

"I know that sometimes," he continued, "women in want and desperation commit sin which they loathe, and I said to myself, 'if one of us must sin, let it be me.'"

Margaret rose from the table, and going to the other side of the room sat down, leaning upon an arm of the chair and covered her face with her hands. Estori followed her.

"Do not despise me, Margherita," he begged; "I did not think of anything but you, how to help you, how to save you. Fauvel kept telling me horrible things that might happen, until I was almost frantic. My heart was breaking for love of you, and my brain bursting for thinking — thinking what I could do. If I asked my cousin Daniele for that sum he would wish to know for what purpose I wanted it, and that I did not care to tell. There seemed no way but this — oh, do not turn from me —"

She raised her head and looked at him. "How did you manage it?" she asked.

"I had permission to visit Prince Estori, you know, but not Fauvel. However, fortune favored me. No one knew of our meeting; we were both strangers in Florence and we went from the Gallery to a less public place, where we talked matters over and arranged it, Meurice and I. I left Florence with Daniele, and remained at his villa a day and a night, then I pretended I had been summoned back suddenly and secretly joined Fauvel. I deceived my Superior and I deceived my cousin. I lied, Margherita, I lied to them both for your sake."

Estori dropped on his knees before her, his beautiful, pleading face was looking up into hers. "Have you nothing to say to me, Margherita *mia*?"

"What can I say," she answered, "you are here — here, and I am happy."

"*Tesoro mio*," he exclaimed, as he took her hands and kissed them.

"Ah," she said slowly "I am only happy because I am in a dream. I am not really here, neither are you. If I were awake I should say you had done very wrong, but nothing seems right or wrong to-night. I feel as if I were drifting — drifting on a calm and lovely sea. Drifting — I don't know where. Nor do I care" — she added, disengaging her hands from his clasp, and throwing up her arms with a gesture of abandonment.

"Do you care to have me drift with you, Margherita?"

"Oh, yes, yes; let us go on together as long as the dream lasts."

*Jim* ("It is no dream, *carissima*.") He was gazing at her intently, at her round white arms, and the soft contour of her neck where the rope of seed pearls rose and fell with every breath. He had never seen her in evening dress before.

And she was looking at him, at the perfect features she loved.

She put her hand on his head; the tonsure was gone. The thick clustering curls that had always been rebellious of their

clipping had almost concealed it. The shorter hair where the ring had been shaved was a sudden reminder of how she had last seen him. "Your habit," she said, "what have you done with it?"

"I changed in a lonely woods. Fauvel provided me with clothes, and I packed my habit in a valise and carried it away with me unnoticed; I met him a few miles distant on the road. We reached the castle after dark and I kept in the background for a few days until my hair grew out somewhat."

"And you honestly knew nothing of Fauvel's plan for bringing me here?"

"As God lives, I swear it. I took advantage of the trust that was placed in me, I disobeyed, I deceived, I *lied*; but I knew nothing of this. I came here simply to get the money to save you from want, or worse. I have posed for Fauvel for hours and hours, dressed in all kinds of stage toggery, as a beggar, a saint, a knight, so that yesterday I was almost relieved to have him go. During his absence I rested and amused myself by exploring the house. The air here makes me very drowsy, and this afternoon I fell sound asleep and was aroused by Fauvel coming to my rooms. I did not even know he had returned, much less of your arrival. I have given in to all he exacted, all his caprices, such as appearing in this ridiculous costume to-night. He said his reason for my wearing it would soon be explained and that I would understand his motives. But I have done it all for you — for you."

"Nothing is explained," she said; "the mystery becomes deeper and deeper to me; then in her turn she told Estori of Fauvel's letter, of her meeting him in Perugia, the long drive through the mountains — "And the Belmontes," she added, completing her story, "who and where are they?"

"I am the Signor Belmonte," he said, rising; "but I know of no other lady in the castle but yourself." *End*

Margaret rose also. "A dream, a dream," she murmured. "Soon I shall awake, so why wonder about anything?"

Estori had not understood her last words, as she had spoken in English.

"Come," he said, "I had forgotten that Fauvel asked us to drink a toast for him."

The sparkling golden wine foamed in the thin-stemmed Venetian glasses that they both raised, first to their erratic host and then to themselves, while Estori gave the toast as the note bade him, "For the past a remembrance, for the present happiness, for the future hope."

Margaret had never before experienced such a dreamy content, a feeling of peace so supreme that she was beyond questioning anything she saw or heard. Wonderful things were happening if they were true, but she doubted the evidence of her own eyes. She had parted from Estori forever. She had torn her heart out and left it in the dark church of San Marco, and had dragged herself home and crept into bed, and now in some fantasy of her sleep he had come back to her — that was all.

They stood alone in the picturesque old room, the youthful knight and the dainty little lady, clothed alike in spotless white like a bridal pair.

She looked at him again. He was standing erect as a young palm with his head held proudly, watching the wine bubble and sparkle in his glass. His long white cloak floated from his shoulders in graceful folds and the silken hose showed to the best advantage the perfect symmetry of his lithe, supple limbs. He had been without color the first part of the evening, but now the rich crimson of his cheeks rivaled the rose on his breast. He was smiling at her now, that exquisite smile of his, which Fauvel had longed to catch upon his canvas, and she was smiling back at him.

To him she was like a white flower, so delicate and fragile that if he touched he might crush it. He glanced at the mass of dark hair on her small head and wondered how she would *look if it were falling over her pretty shoulders, almost as white*

as the soft, silvery stuff that clothed her. He looked down at the satin slippers, spangled in silver, that encased her little feet; from head to foot she was dainty and beautiful and white, like a hyacinth bell, he thought, and a mad impulse seized him to crush the flower in a wild embrace. *He* also was beginning to feel as if under the influence of a charm that any sudden action might dispel. He did not seem to be himself, another personality had taken possession of him.

Was he drunk with the wine, or was he drunk with the beauty of Margherita?

She was standing still as a statue. She had lowered her eyes and fixed them upon the disc of her wine glass.

Silence reigned in the old castle. Clemente had retired to his quarters and they were alone. The room was warm and the air heavy with the perfume of roses. The stillness was almost oppressive, intense, as though Night itself were in love, and each silent moment a pulse of its heart. They had no idea of the hour. Many of the wax tapers had died out in their sconces and an antique lamp on a tall stand at the foot of the curtained archway was burning low.

"Margherita," Leone said very gently. She looked up, meeting his eyes. All at once a flame leapt into life. With a quick movement he took the glass from her hand and threw his arm round her.

"Drink from my glass," he said imperiously, "and tell me that thou lovest me."

She obeyed, then pushing it away, "You know I love you, you know it." "Speak as I speak," he said again, "in the language of love. The other way is cold. It may not be so in English, but with us it is different—to the beloved *thee* and *thou* always."

"I love thee, Leone."

He placed the glass upon the table and took her in his arms. "And I adore thee, Margherita, thou art more beautiful to-night than I have ever seen thee."

"It is thou who art beautiful, not I," she answered slowly, for speaking in the second person singular was new to her. "There is no other man as handsome as thou art in the whole world! How I wish I were an artist like Fauvel, I too would paint thee, but no one can paint thine eyes — they are melted stars." She could say no more, for his lips were upon hers, her arms stole round his neck and all speech was lost in the ecstasy of that kiss.

"Margherita," he whispered finally, "the first time I met thee something happened. Dost thou remember how we looked once into each other's eyes, while the bleak December wind sighed through the leafless trees?"

"Yes," she said faintly, "I remember."

"Instantly we started a fire together, which was being fanned all the way back to town, and when we went into the church of the Gesù and I knelt beside thee it blazed up — it consumed me, and it has been consuming me ever since. I tried to extinguish it over and over again. *Grand Dio!* how I have tried! And that last day when we parted in Rome I believed I had succeeded in stifling it. I deceived myself; often fire that seems extinct sleeps under its ashes and it has burst forth again, fiercer and wilder, more uncontrollable than ever before, and the flames are now too high and fierce and hot for me to battle with them; thou art the fire, Margherita, dost thou hear me, dost thou understand? I love thee, I am mad for thee — I cannot live another day without thee; I —"

"Oh, hush, hush!" she cried; "do not spoil the dream; I am so happy, and soon it will all disappear."

"I told thee before, my treasure, this is not a dream."

"Ah," she said, "I know better." She was still resting on his arm looking up into his face as she spoke. "Not long ago I had a vision like this — like this. I found myself in ancient halls, just as I find here, in this place, though I never entered its doors until to-day. I saw tall trees and towering mountains, and thou camest to me all in white, as I see thee now, and

every worry, every care had gone, and all was love and happiness and peace. But the vision had scarcely come before it was gone and I saw only the forlorn courtyard beneath my window, and the rain pouring down and my expenses going on, with no money to meet them, and — oh, let us not break the dream, only too soon it will pass like the other. Life is so hard — and I am so lonely!” She laid her head on his shoulder to hide the tears that started to her eyes.

“I tell thee, *carissima*, it is not a dream. I will never leave thee again. Thou shalt never more have things to pain or worry thee. I will care for thee always. See,” he said, “like this will I make for thee life’s pathway.” He took the roses from the crystal bowl that stood near him and with a superb gesture tossed the flowers high over their heads and let them fall to the floor in a shower of crimson sweetness.

The last waxen taper burned down to its socket. The great room was almost dark, save for the dim light from the expiring lamp, and the stillness of the castle seemed unearthly.

A sense of great weariness stole over Margaret. The almost sleepless night, the long drive, the excitement of the evening, were telling upon her, and yet the peace, the quietude, the sight of Estori near her, were all so blissfully strange that she could not make up her mind that it was real.

“I think,” she said, as she picked up a rose that had caught in the lace of her gown, “that if this is not a dream, then — we are in the next world together. We are dead.”

Estori laughed. It sounded very human, his own sweet musical laugh that she knew so well. “No, *amore*, we live.” Gently he led her to the end of the room where the velvet curtains hung in the archway. As they reached the marble steps the lamp suddenly flared up and went out, leaving them in darkness.

“Oh,” cried Margaret, “the lamp, it is out, what shall we do, how find our way without a light?”

Leone ran up the steps and pushed back the curtain. “We

need no light but God's lamp, the moon," he said, pointing upward. From a window above a flood of moonlight was pouring down a tower stair. "Come, Margherita, thou art very weary; I will show thee where thou canst rest."

He stood at the top of the steps, holding out his hand to her, but she hesitated. He seemed more unreal than ever, framed in the archway, clad in white and bathed in silvery sheen. "Come," he said again.

A few sweet, low notes broke the hush without. She started back. "What is that?" she gasped.

"It is the nightingale calling to her mate. Come!"

Slowly she mounted the steps and took his outstretched hand. He turned to lead her up the stairway, but once more she lingered. "I am afraid," she whispered.

"Dost thou fear me?" he asked in wounded tones.

"No, no," she answered, putting her other hand on his shoulder and looking into his eyes with all trust and confidence, "I love thee, Leone, I love thee."

"*Amore mio*, what dost thou fear?"

"The awaking," she faltered; "thou wilt be gone, and I shall find myself alone."

He clasped her to his heart in a passionate embrace. "Thou shalt wake in my arms."

The glory of the moon streamed down upon them and the air thrilled with the love-song of the nightingale — amorous, sweet and low.

\* \* \* \* \*

In the early morning a horseman was riding over the old road where the Roman soldiers once came clanking. The sun had not risen high in the heavens, the green earth was yet fresh, and spider-webs glistened in the dew like bits of gossamer upon the grass. The rider was leaving behind him a poor, wretched little village that cowered below a great rock, where high above it a half-ruined fortress still proudly reared its war-scarred towers above the crumbling walls. The rider was Fauvel on

his splendid mare, "Fiora," and he was experiencing the novel sensation of an evil conscience.

Fauvel was not a bad man. He lived and enjoyed his life according to his beliefs and theories, going out of his way to do many kind actions, and it had been a long time since conscience had troubled him. But now, as he turned his horse off the smooth highway into a steep rough path, and was approaching his dwelling, he realized with a shock the thing he had done! He had tried from his first acquaintance with Estori to make him discontented, had even urged him at times to cast aside his habit. He was fond of the boy and really wished to see him happy, but his friendship had never been disinterested; he had coveted his beauty as the perfect model that might make his name famous. He had sacrificed Estori to himself and he had sacrificed Margherita to Estori. Little, helpless, homeless Margherita! He had thrown her to a young panther uncaged for the first time.

Truly generous he had been, truly magnanimous, he told himself in the sarcasm of his thoughts. Through working on his love and sympathies he had led Estori into lying and deceit, in order to gain a sum of money for the American girl, whom he, Fauvel, might have helped to help herself had he cared to do so, without compromising either of them. He had only consulted his own selfish pleasure and purposes.

He had seen the lovers meet, and they had made a beautiful picture which pleased his senses, and he preferred to think of them happy together rather than pining in separation. He knew that he could keep Estori only for the few days' leave he had been granted by his Superior, therefore he had used Margherita as a bait to tempt him further. He had not weighed the enormity of what he had done. He had interfered with the working of an old and great Order of the Church. He had tried to destroy the simple faith of a youth who had pledged his life to that Order, and had wrenched him from it by wringing his heart, and the girl he had decoyed by trickery.

He was double their age. He had been guilty of leading the young astray, he was a villain! Yes, let him call a spade a spade. Fauvel was always just, and he was not sparing himself. It had all amused and interested him, but he had been playing with souls.

For many years Fauvel had considered himself an unbeliever, but there was a text in the Latin Vulgate with a horrible curse in it that disturbed him now. "But he that shall scandalize one of these little ones that believes in Me, it were better for him that a millstone should be hanged about his neck and that he should be drowned in the depths of the sea." He gave the mare a sharp sting of the whip for he wished to reach the castle quickly. There in the eastern wing, called the "Morningside," were his pretty prisoners; it had hidden many a secret in its day, it would hide theirs.

"I will make it up to them," he said; "they shall never suffer for this, neither of them. Estori shall be on his way to Genoa in a few hours, or remain and be my heir and I will care for Margherita as a father."

He entered the grounds by a gate in the wall that was near the stables, and, leaving the mare in Beppo's care, hastened indoors to his own apartments and rang loudly for Clemente. He scribbled a quick note to Estori, saying that if he still wished to sail on Saturday with the Franciscan missionaries, horses would be ready to take him to the railway at Fossato, where he could catch the noon train and make connections for Genoa; that he would provide for Margherita, and he could go without fears for her future. On the other hand, if he no longer cared to join his companions he was to know that Rocca Serrata was his home and hers as long as they cared to remain. In it he enclosed a thousand *lire*.

"Take this note to Signor Belmonte," he said, as Clemente appeared, "and bring me an answer;" then he fixed himself a "drip absinthe" and sat down with it to rest.

*He was not surprised at the reply he received:*

*Dear and wonderful friend:*

I desire only from henceforth to be with Margherita. We would both rather die at once than be separated again.

I am eternally yours,

LEONE BELMONTE.

And the thousand *lire* were returned.

Fauvel smiled. "*L'amour*," he murmured, "*l'amour tu as conquis*." Then, addressing Clemente, he bade him bring his breakfast and "make the coffee strong," he said, "strong, and do not let any one disturb me until luncheon, for I have had no sleep."

When the servant was gone he rose and opening a secret drawer in his desk, slipped the note and the money inside. The latter he should insist upon the boy's accepting. He rejoiced at their decision; it took a load off his mind, and yet these words still haunted him: "it were better for him, *that a millstone should be hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depths of the sea.*"

"I will make it up to them," he swore, "I will make it up to them, so help me God."

## CHAPTER XV

### THE HIDING PLACE

"Why should I keep from love's embrace  
Because of shame?  
Why turn aside my heated face?  
Am I to blame  
That all my life within me cries  
For love, and lips that kiss their sighs  
Till heart unites with heart — and dies —  
Am I to blame?"

Margaret sat on the terrace with a book in her hand. All the sweet perfume of midsummer was in the air, an orange-winged oriole was singing from a grove of cypress spires close by and over her head the thrushes were answering him in a high and joyous chorus.

Behind her stood the grim castle, darkened with the sun and rain of centuries. A portion of it had been altered by a former owner, and at this side assumed more the appearance of a great villa, having a two-storied loggia, a terrace and a quaint old sloping garden where pink and white oleander trees, that bloom late in this altitude, were now in full blossom. Stiff cacti marked the corners of the paths, and the low boxwood hedge tried to keep the flowers and shrubs from running wild. An embankment covered with myrtle and iris concealed the course of a spring that emptied into an ancient marble sarcophagus and overflowed into a fountain.

All around as far as the eye could reach were range after range of mountains rising one behind the other (like waves of a rolling sea), that broke from somber depths to towering heights of amethyst haze to become lost in the sky.

Margaret held the book but she was not reading; her own life at present was more interesting and beautiful than anything *she could find* between its covers. She let it drop in her lap

and leaned back in dreamy languor to enjoy the magnificence of the landscape and to breathe in the scent of iris and cyclamen that was wafted to her on the soft breeze. Upon the third finger of her left hand she wore a ring of hammered gold. It looked bright and new, but in reality was two thousand years old.

She had heard that her mother<sup>\*</sup> was improving, had written home that her own plans had all been changed; she had found a far better and delightful position as companion to a Signora Belmonte, and was spending the summer in a castle in the Apennines.

In this mental security and bodily ease she had given herself up to the trancelike enjoyment of the present; let the future take care of itself, this was the heyday of youth, and she was a worshipper at Love's altar. She heard a glad shout, and looked up to see a young man breaking through the tall hedge that inclosed the gardens below. He wore a dark green hunting suit and high russet boots. The glow of health was in his face and the light of happiness in his eyes, as he waved to her, calling her by name. The book fell upon the grass, and she ran to meet him.

He took her in his arms and held her in a close and long embrace. "Have you missed me, *diletto mio*?" \* he asked, as they sat on the marble seat together. "Do you know, it is the first time we have been parted for more than an hour?"

They were supremely happy. Their lives were simple and natural, almost poetical and apparently without scruple. So far "the way of the transgressor" had not been "hard."

They sat in the old garden in the cool of the summer afternoon, the soothing plash of the fountain behind them and the pink and white petals of an oleander tree falling gently upon them. Leone's arm was thrown lightly around his love and her head rested on his shoulder, and together they gazed over the vast stretch of mountains where, miles away to the south-

\* *My delight.*

west, lay the Eternal City — Rome — where they had both known so much misery.

"How good God is," he said at length, "to have made the earth so beautiful! I think the Garden of Eden could not have been any fairer than this."

"Yes," said Margaret musingly, "and here there is no serpent — no danger."

"There is the bottomless well," he said.

"What is that," she asked; "where is it — not here in the garden?"

"No, it is over there," and he pointed in the direction of the fallen tower. "It is a dangerous place; Fauvel has warned me; it is a natural reservoir so deep no one has ever been able to sound the bottom."

"Is that where you have put your habit," she whispered; "have you thrown it down the well?"

"No," he answered soberly, "but I have hidden it safely."

"Show me where?"

"Come," he said.

Hand in hand they left the restful shades of the garden, mounted the steps of the terrace to a door that opened upon it, and passed under the portal of the place that had so strangely become their home.

When Rocca Serrata was a princely dwelling, as well as a mighty fortress during intervals of peace, its lords had bidden the artists of Florence and Perugia to enrich and beautify it. Now it was almost dismantled, stripped of all its paintings and many of its tapestries, its frescoes dim, and its marbles stained and broken; but with it all there remained a stately beauty that seemed to gain rather than lose by the touch of Time.

After going up a broad stair and crossing the covered gallery of a small inner court which joined the main building to its northern flank, Leone stopped before an imposing door; he pushed it with his foot and it swung in, leading down several *steps* into a sort of ante-room which looked as if it might be

the entrance to other apartments. It was empty with the exception of a long wooden chest, rudely carved, and beside it, as if guarding its hidden treasures, stood a suit of ancient armor. Opposite the entrance hung a large panel of ragged tapestry in which horsemen with lances and spears were barely discernible.

"It is here," Leone said.

"Here? Where?"

"In this," he replied, touching the armor.

"Inside of that?" she asked; "when did you put it there?"

"The day after you came. Fauvel told me to hide it. 'There are plenty of deserted rooms and safe hiding places, go and find one,' he said, and I found this; I stuffed the habit inside this old fellow. No one would ever suspect it was there. Don't you think it a fine place, Margherita?"

"No," she said critically, "I do not. Fauvel says he often allows people to come here — writers, artists, antiquarians — and they go through the castle and poke into everything, and any one interested in old armor would take this apart in no time, and if they should find a monk's habit inside, it would look exactly as if it were purposely hidden, quickly and secretly, don't you see? Let us put it in this chest, and then if it should be found nothing much would be thought of it; it might have lain there for a hundred years, who could tell; your habits do not change their style, do they?"

"No," he said, "they have remained the same since the day of St. Francis in the 13th century."

"Very well, then, if ever discovered, one would naturally suppose it belonged to some monk who once lived here. Don't you think so? Come, let us try to open the chest; see, the key is in it."

He knelt, and after a moment's tugging at the lock, it yielded and they lifted the lid together. "Now," said Margaret, "give it to me." He began to remove the habit from the different parts of the armor where he had hastily thrust it. The brown cloth was streaked with rust and dust, which she wir-

off and neatly folding it, piece by piece, laid it carefully in the chest — the robe, the cape, the hood, the sandals, the coarse socks, and then the knotted white cords and the long Rosary, he standing by and watching her.

"The door," she said cautiously; "you had better stay there and keep guard."

"No one ever comes here; this is the north wing that ends in the ruined tower. It's considered unsafe, and has a bad name besides. They tell tales in the village about it, Fauvel says, and the servants are afraid — that's why I chose it. Down below is the old well I spoke of. It might have been better to have thrown it in the well, after all; our secret would have been safer."

"You could never get it again," she said.

She paused in her work, holding the small black cap in her hand, the last article that completed the monk's dress and which she was just about to lay away with the rest. "You might want to put it on again some day."

"Never, never, Margherita. Why do you say such things?"

"You might cease to love me."

"Ah, you do not understand my love for you; it is deathless," he declared vehemently. "All I fear is that you might grow weary of me, and then, even then, I would have no use for it, for I would throw myself into the well if that day should come."

"That day will never come, Leone dearest; never, never. Let us shut it up quickly; it is safe here, and we will forget it."

This had not been a pleasant quarter of an hour for Margaret. The same troublesome voice that used to worry her in Rome was making itself heard again, and the youth at her side in his manly beauty had such a short time since been that sweet-faced young monk, and she — she was the cause of his casting off *this habit* that they were now hurrying to conceal like a *murdered corpse*. "Close it quick and let us go," she said.

He shut down the lid, turned the key in the lock and took her in his arms.

"How cold you are, *amore*," he said; "why, you are trembling!"

"I am nervous," she answered; "let us go."

"I should not have brought you here to this lonely, dark room," he said tenderly, as he led her from it, "but there is nothing to be afraid of, *carissima*, it is only the foolish talk of peasants — telling tales of this part of the castle."

"Oh, it is not ghosts, or silly stories that I fear."

"What then?"

"God," she whispered; "we cannot hide it from Him."

"No, no, Margherita," he said confidently. "God is not angry with us. He is a God of Love, not a God of Vengeance, or of Fear. That is what Fauvel believes, and he says the *keeping*, not the *breaking*, of such vows is the sin, and I believe it now also. God is our loving Father, and He wishes His children to be happy, and we are happy — is it not so? Have no fear, Margherita *mia*, we will go back to the garden; but first I must put away this key."

Retracing their steps through the tortuous windings of the great house, they turned at length into a light and airy corridor where the frescoes of the Zodiac told her that it led to their own quarters, which they soon reached. Leone, for the name Estori was never spoken now, passed into his bed chamber and hid the key of the chest behind the frame of a picture.

These rooms, with their lofty ceilings and great gilt cornices, their four-post *baldacchino* \* beds, and the silk rotting upon the panels of the walls, in former times were known as the state apartments. Now they were occupied by the Belmontes, and it was odd to see the evidences of twentieth-century wearing apparel and toilet articles, amidst these by-gone splendors.

While Leone was concealing the key Margaret stood before

\* Canopy.

the long mirror in her room, combed back a few stray locks, and gave a smoothing touch to her pretty, girlish toilet. Then they descended the stair together, merrily, hand in hand, passed from the dark old fortress back into the summer air, with the birds and flowers and sunshine.

Clemente had brought the tea-tray out into the loggia, where Fauvel sat waiting for Margaret to preside. He had a newspaper in his hand which he folded and slipped behind his chair. "I had quite a chat with old Santoni, the postmaster, while I was waiting for the mail to come along," he said.

"Was there any mail for me, Fauvel?" Margaret asked.

"Nothing for any of us; only my newspapers from Perugia," he replied, "and in one of them there is an article copied from the *Giornale d'Italia* in Rome which is of interest to us all, especially so to the Belmontes."

Fauvel took up the paper again, found the article, and handed it to Leone:

The Police authorities have about come to the conclusion that the young Fra Felice Estori of the Order of Minor Franciscans, who has been missing for four weeks, has met with foul play. The police of Florence and the Carabinieri in their patrol of that part of the country where he was last seen, are now looking for his body, as all hope that he is living has been abandoned. It is thought he was trapped by a decoy letter, ostensibly from his Superior, the murderers believing him to be the bearer of a sum of money to the Order, as was frequently the case.

The article went on to detail the family connections of the lost man, and to eulogize him with something more than the usual warmth.

Without comment, Leone placed the paper in Margherita's hand, left the loggia, and, going to the grove of cypress trees, stood there looking far out over the mountains.

"Is it not wonderful," Margaret said to Fauvel, after reading the notice, "that no one suspects the truth?"

"It is most remarkable," he replied, "how easily satisfie

with a conclusion some persons are, and here is proof of the inefficient detective work done. A murder more or less in Italy does not count, and I doubt if this poor monk would have been mentioned more than once by the papers if he had not belonged to a prominent family."

"And you think his identity is safe up here?" Margaret asked.

"Perfectly. It would not be wise for him to go into Perugia and other cities or towns where there are Franciscan convents, for fear of recognition. Their members are always changing from one of their houses to another."

"No," she said, "the disgrace of being found out would be terrible to him."

"There is no danger," said Fauvel, "if he does as I say." He soaked a piece of cake in his tea, and fed it to the macaw, whose stand was close beside him. "It is always well to avoid unpleasant episodes if possible."

While he was intent on his pet, Margaret slipped away and joined Leone.

"Why are you so silent, Leone *mio*?" she asked, linking her arm through his; "has that article hurt you?"

He laughed softly. "No," he said, "nothing could please me more. It has all managed itself so easily; it has all come about so wonderfully." Then a strange, sweet smile passed over his face, and he added very quietly, "It seems almost like the hand of God."

"What do you mean?" she said. This was a phase in his nature that she could not comprehend. He seemed to be moving in a transport of hallowed delight, without a feeling of guilt to mar his happiness. There was no hypocrisy about him, no shame. Suddenly and without compunction he had settled all his religious doubts and duties in the one idea that "God is love," and he was living on in the same unconscious state of happiness as the woodland creatures who know no sin. Margaret was still normal. There were things she did not wish to

think of, and others she wished to forget. She was learning each day to stifle her conscience more and more. She loved Leone tenderly, devotedly, passionately, and as long as she had him near her that was the chief thing, and she settled all in the one word, "Fate."

"What do you mean," she asked again; "why is it like the hand of God?"

"Because it has all come about so wonderfully. I made the sacrifice that my calling required. I left you, God knows that. I parted from you, though it wrenched body and soul apart. Do you know the Scripture story of Abraham and Isaac, Margherita? How God called Abraham and told him to make a burnt offering of Isaac, his son, and Abraham obeyed though it broke his heart, and just as he had bound Isaac to the faggots and was about to light them, the Angel of the Lord called to him from heaven to stop, saying that God did not desire him to slay Isaac. The Lord saw that Abraham was willing to obey, that was all He required of him. He saw that I was willing to obey, and when I had, you came to me again like a gift from God. So I know that He is not angry with me, for He is our loving Father and wants all His children to be happy."

Arm in arm they walked through the trees and out upon the ramparts where a buttress hid them from Fauvel, who sat watching them, leaning against a column of the loggia with his macaw upon his arm.

"This newspaper talk is the most blessed solution of my disappearance," Leone said, "for there is no one to really mourn or grieve. My mother," bitterly, "has other children and ceased to care for *me* long ago. Donna Bianca will feel badly," he added sorrowfully; "she loves me, but she has her daughter and is far away. Daniele I think will be sorry, but he also has other interests and leads a pleasant society life; he will soon forget me. My companions, the brothers, and my dear old Padre Carlo, they will miss me and grieve for me, but they have

he consolation of their religion. Already I suppose they are saying masses for my soul, believing me dead."

"But you are not dead, Leone —"

"Ah, no, *amore mio*; death seems horrible to me," he said, shuddering. "I want to live, to live as long as the mountains, to love you, Margherita. I feel as if I could never die! I could never be so dead that I would not feel your kiss; if you walked over my grave it would bring me back to life. I should rise up through the sod and clasp you to the heart that had commenced to beat once more!"

"But I might die —"

"No, no, *diletto mio*!" He threw his arms around her and held her tightly, as if to keep her forever. "God would not be so cruel as to take you from me," and his beautiful eyes burned with tenderest light through the quick tears that rose at the mere thought of losing her. He pressed her to him in such a desperate embrace that she could scarcely breathe. He was a typical child of that country and people where passion reigns supreme. "Ah," he murmured, "no one has ever lived until they know freedom and love!"

The last spark of remorse had been quenched and the lovers cast away all trouble, while they swore a devotion as eternal as the hills.

## CHAPTER XVI

### COUNTING THE COST

"O gentle, blythe and thoughtless youth  
Go dancing on your way;  
For soon the bitter fount you'll meet  
And of its cup, alas! alas!  
Perchance you'll drink ere you shall pass,  
Then find the rose-clouds gray."

Fauvel had been absent from the castle for several weeks, traveling through Umbria and studying the works of Giotto and Perugino. It was nearly the middle of October and he was due in Rome by the twenty-fifth.

Altogether he was well pleased with his summer work. He had a great picture of Estori, as "Youth," near completion besides, he had numerous sketches of him, and he felt that he had made progress in his art.

He was sorry to leave the country in its autumnal beauty while the ringing axes were sending down the tree trunks with the falling acorns of the scarlet oak, and the yellow leaves of the chestnut. He had come back to spend the last few days at Rocca Serrata and see how his household was progressing.

Margaret made a charming little *menagère*, and his domestic arrangements had never been so well ordered as under her neat and systematic American ways. By her directions old curtains were mended, marbles were scrubbed and dust and cobwebs removed. Fauvel had felt quite at ease in leaving the place in the care of the "Belmontes"; he was a little surprised that they were not around to welcome him.

When he left, a merry game of battledore and shuttlecock had been going on in the courtyard. The sun had shone brightly that day five weeks ago, and the sky had been blue;

now dark, sullen, threatening clouds hung low over the mountains.

Clemente had taken his luggage and brought him refreshment, but still his protégés had not appeared. "The Signor and Signora Belmonte, are they well," Fauvel asked, "and are they at home?"

"Yes, *Illustrissimo*, I believe so; that is, the Signore. Shall I tell him the *Professore* has come?"

"No, never mind; I will find them myself."

Fauvel went upstairs first, but they were not in their rooms; he called but no one answered; then he came down on the terrace and gardens, but they were nowhere to be seen. He started to walk around the grounds. Away off by the ruins he saw Margaret.

On this side of the castle the path was overgrown with dank weeds; no one came here, as it was considered unsafe, for there was a great rift in the tower wall, whose top had already fallen. Even now as Fauvel came towards it a dislodged stone slipped from its place, adding one more to the pile of ruin below. He was rather provoked that she should be there; he had cautioned them both; besides, the treacherous well was close by.

This well had been here from time immemorial, long before Rocca Serrata had been built or thought of. It had probably counted in deciding the site of the castle. It was a deep, natural reservoir, fed from subterranean springs that had their source in a higher range of mountains. Fauvel believed it had been a shepherd's well in the Pelasgic or Etruscan era, as the remnants of the wall he knew to be Etruscan, not Roman, work.

Margaret was going straight towards it; unless one was familiar with its exact location on this rough, uneven ground, a step too near might prove fatal.

Fauvel hurried his pace; she did not see him, as he was behind her and he was afraid to call for fear of startling her. She was acting very strangely. She went forward a step or

two, then retreated, as if recoiling; suddenly she threw her arms out in a desperate gesture and raised her head as if imploring aid from above.

In an instant Fauvel was behind her, putting his hands on her outstretched arms. She gave a little scream and turned.

"Oh," she cried, "Fauvel, how you frightened me!"

"You frightened me, Margherita," he said. "See there," and keeping firm hold of her, he led her forward a yard or so, and showed her a large circular opening in the rocky ground, where far below gleamed black water.

"This well is fathoms deep," he said, "it goes down, down into the maw of the mountain; if you fell in, there could be no rescue."

"Yes," she said, "I know it. That is why I am here."

"Margherita!"

"I came here to die," she said. "Two or three times I've tried it — yes, I've tried to throw myself in, but I cannot; it's so dark and terrible down there, and I'm so young to die!"

"Margherita!" He turned her around sharply and looked at her. She was very white, and there was an unmistakable expression in the eyes that dropped beneath his scrutiny.

"You are ill," he said, "and not yourself. You would never contemplate suicide if in your senses."

"Yes, I am ill," she moaned. As she spoke she became still paler, staggered, and would have fallen had not Fauvel caught her.

"Come away from here," he said; "come back to the house and lie down and I will give you something to make you feel better."

"Oh," she cried, "it's too awful! I can't bear it, I did not think — I did not count the cost. It was a summer night, a beautiful dream. It seemed as if the world had become a paradise and that summer would last forever. But the birds have stopped singing, the sun has not shone for days, and winter *will soon come*, as it is coming to me — the winter of life."

"The 'winter of life,' Margherita, means old age; it does not mean motherhood."

"Oh, stop, stop!" she wailed, covering her face with her hands. "I cannot bear it."

"I thought you loved Leone," he said very gently.

"I do, I do; but the disgrace — it is that! If he were really free, as other men, it would not be so bad — but it is the thought that the father of my child is — is — oh, it is that part I cannot bear, even if we were married! No matter how safely we may hide his habit, no matter how cleverly we may lose his identity, it is that thought that is with me constantly; it burns into my soul, it drives me mad, it makes me want to kill myself."

"Hush, hush, this is folly. He is no longer a monk, he is the man who worships you. If you kill yourself you will kill him also."

"All the better perhaps for us both to die."

"Nonsense! You will both live to be happy parents."

Fauvel picked up a black lace scarf that she had let fall and put it round her neck.

"Monsieur," she began, turning to him her white, appealing face, "you do not seem to understand how I feel. You met me a penniless waif in Rome, and you were kind to me always, and then you brought me here, and —"

"Throw the blame all on me, Margherita, I can bear it; I am to blame, I deceived you —"

"No, I was not going to say that. I was a poor little nobody in Rome whom you were kind to, but at my home in New York my family on both sides are well-known people. We have been poor only since my father's death. I have wealthy relatives whose position is second to none in their own land. I am as well born in the United States as Leone Estori is in Italy. My mother and sister are very proud —"

"They were not too proud to let you starve."

"They could not help that. My sister has nothing but what

her husband gives her, and he is supporting my mother. I sides, I never let them know half the trouble I was in. I write them I was getting on nicely, just as I wrote them this summer giving them a false impression of the Belmontes and everything here. But I would rather drown myself now than have them ever know the truth. Oh, Fauvel," she cried desperately, "you are a doctor, you can help me. Do something for me, help me help me!"

"I will help you when the time comes. If you take care of yourself you will be the mother of one of the loveliest children ever born."

"The child shall never be born."

"Hush," he said sternly, "that is insane talk. What does Leone say?"

"Oh, he is glad, but then he does not appear to understand right from wrong any more. He is always happy."

"And so will you be too, *ma chère*. You have had a shock and you are ill. You will feel differently by and by. Go back to the house and order a fire made in the cedar room and I will be there directly. Here comes Leone, and I want to speak with him first."

Margaret pulled her scarf over her head and obeyed, and when she left Leone came bounding up.

"Meurice, Meurice, how glad I am to see you!" and he flung his arms around Fauvel in the warmth of his greeting. "I should have been at the gate to meet you, but Margherita has not been well and I was reading aloud to her, trying to amuse her, when Beppo came and said there was a peddler in the servants' hall. I wanted some lead pencils, and while he was gone Margherita slipped away. I knew she was outdo for her scarf was gone. I was searching for her all over the house and at last I came here and saw you both talking together, and she has gotten ahead of me in welcoming me home."

*Leone* was the personification of youth and health and bu

ancy. He had a proud, expectant look in his great eyes, combined with a certain seriousness.

"I missed you in your accustomed place when I came up," said Fauvel, "but you are right, you must always think of Margherita first."

"Meurice," he began, "I have something to tell you;" he blushed as he spoke, and hesitated. "When the Spring comes, when the syringa is in bloom, there may be another one of us here. A very small some one — shall you be glad, Meurice — shall you like it?"

"Yes," said Fauvel, smiling, "I shall be very glad."

"I knew you would say so," Leone exclaimed, delighted. "Margherita thought you would be angry."

"I angry! Why?"

"Because she said that you supported us now and it would make one more —"

"The castle is big enough, is it not, to hold another?"

"Oh, Meurice, how good you are! Now I am quite happy."

"Margherita is not happy," said Fauvel; "she is miserable."

"I know," Leone replied soberly; "she seems to look upon it as a disgrace. I have told her I will face everything and we will be married —"

"If you wish to create a big scandal there would be no surer way of doing it than by marrying at present. It would be useless to marry her under the name of Belmonte, as it would not be legal and if you came out boldly with your true name you would be recognized at once as the lost Estori. You would have headlines in all the papers, 'Fra Felice, the runaway monk, and Miss Margaret Randolph, the American girl, who enticed him from the cloister.' The news would be cabled to New York and — zipp! a fine broil for you both. A delicate bit you would furnish to the gossips of Rome for many a long day! Marriage in the future to legitimize your child will be all

very well, when you are forgotten and people have ceased to think of you; when there would be no danger of dragging in Margherita's name with your own, as would be inevitable at present, and the marriage when feasible to consider it must take place in some foreign country, not in Italy."

"That is all true, Meurice, but it hurts me so, when she talks of disgrace. I don't know what to think —"

"Do not think at all, *caro mio*; let me do the thinking for you. How often have I told you both to trust me. I will manage this as I have managed everything else for you. Margherita is feeling miserably ill at present and inclined to be melancholy. That is not unusual under the circumstances. In a few weeks the illness will pass off and she will be herself again, but in the meantime she needs care and watching. She ought to have some sensible, older woman with her. A woman needs the companionship of her own sex at this time, some one who can wait upon her and be companionable as well. Lisa is only a faithful animal, with no mind above her housework. I wish I knew the right person —"

"There is some one in Rome," suggested Leone, "whom she is very fond of, a middle-aged woman, who was maid at that fashionable pension-school where Margherita lived when I first met her. She speaks of her constantly, and often says she longs to see her; she is an educated woman and devoted to Margherita."

"Has she ever seen you?"

"Never seen or heard of me."

"The very one. Ask Margherita to write her and see if she will come out here. She can say she is now the Signora Belmonte and anything else she chooses. Tell Margherita to offer her whatever wages she thinks right and direct her to come by way of Fossato, and some one will meet her. And now I have something important to say to you. In case of my death —"

"Oh, Meurice, stop — stop!"

"Listen to me," said the older man peremptorily. "In case of my death, you are to live here as long as you choose, for I have left Rocca Serrata to you in my will."

"Meurice!"

"Wait, there will be an income too, and each year there is a little money to be made from the pine woods on the slopes which belong to this property. Clemente understands the sale of it; you are to consult him in business; he is shrewd."

"How can I ever thank you for all you do for me!" Leone said in grateful tones; "but you are not going to die."

"We all die sooner or later — to-day, to-morrow, twenty years from now — and it is criminal not to settle one's affairs. As to my being good to you, I think I am only fair to you. I took you away from the calling where you were provided for for life. I am merely doing my duty by you. You also are good to me; you are my best and most patient model. I shall want a sitting to-day."

"Certainly; what costume? Shall I get ready at once?"

"No, at four o'clock; the light will be good for an hour, and dress for the 'Street Musician.' To-morrow early we will have our last sitting for 'Youth.' I want you to be as fresh as a lettuce for that, and you don't look quite up to the mark at present."

"I have been worried about Margherita, but I am relieved now that you know and are pleased. Will you tell Margherita also that you are glad, and that we will all be happy together, and explain about the marriage and ask her not to talk of disgrace. I cannot understand her; for me it will be such a joy to have the little one."

Fauvel looked at him. His eyes were sparkling with pride and happiness. What a boy he was, without realization of the responsibilities of life.

"Leone Estori," said Fauvel solemnly, "you must always be good to Margherita and your child as long as you live."

"Meurice," he replied equally solemnly, "if I am ever any-

thing but good to Margherita and my own child, I hope you will kick me down the well."

Fauvel smiled. "That is the proper sentiment," he said; "now go and find her. I am going to the stables, then I will join you, and remember, no matter what happiness this event may bring to you, it will not be all joy for Margherita."

Margaret was huddled up on a couch in the cedar-room with her face to the wall when Leone found her. She was shivering and shaking with a chill. He threw more wood on the fire and taking down a heavy cloak that was hanging upon antlers, wrapped it tenderly around her and knelt down beside her.

"Heart of my heart," he whispered, "do not be so sad. Fauvel is not angry; he is pleased. He says also that you will feel better soon. Turn and look at me, I have something good to tell thee," falling into the sweet form of speaking that he so often used: "Fauvel says that we are to send for that woman of thine in Rome who is fond of thee — Giacinta, is it not? — to come and take care of thee."

"Oh, that would be good," she said, turning towards him and brushing away a tear, "how I should love to see her, my dear Giacinta. Did he really say so? How kind he is!"

Then Leone explained how she was to write as Fauvel had arranged and when the latter entered a few moments later he found them side by side on the couch composing a letter.

He drew up a chair and sat down. "Let me have the paper and pencil a moment," he said to Leone, and wrote a prescription. "Here is something for Margherita; find Beppo and tell him to take Fiora and ride to Fossato and get the apothecary to put this up, I am all out of it here."

Leone rushed off to do his bidding and Fauvel talked seriously with Margaret, asking questions and assuring her that she should have every care and attention, showing her the inadvisability of a hasty marriage and cautioning her not to be melancholy or think of disgrace.

"What a friend you are to us, Monsieur," she said, when he

had consoled and comforted her, "and we, we are just an expense and a trouble to you."

"Margherita," he answered, "it displeases me to have you say such things. I take a selfish pleasure in having you two young people here. It is nothing to my credit." Then rising and changing his tone, he said cheerfully, "And now, little Lady Belmonte, with your gracious permission I will ring for tea. You are to lie still and direct in the making, and you shall see what clumsy fellows Leone and I will be handling the cups and saucers."

In less than two weeks Giacinta had become a member of the castle household. She had had several months' rest from service and entered into the duties of her position with much zeal, delighted that her prophecy had come true and that the Signorina Randolph had found "a brave young signore" and was "happily married."

She was called "Sora Giacinta" by the other servants, as her position was above theirs, being a sort of general manager now that the young mistress was indisposed.

And her coming brought the utmost relief to Margaret. It was so good to have some one of her own sex, to whom she could talk intelligently, and Giacinta was lavish in her motherly care for Margaret's health and comfort. She was also an excellent seamstress and soon interested "the Signora" in pretty needlework.

In the short winter afternoons the two would sit together with their sewing downstairs in the cedar room. This was the most comfortable and homelike room in the castle, the floor, wainscoted walls, and raftered ceiling being entirely of cedar. The sun poured in through the deep recessed windows, and it had an immense fireplace where they kept up a roaring fire. They had arranged a portion of it near the fireplace with a rug, a couch, and a big square table that held a powerful oil lamp.

Margaret was feeling much better, as Fauvel had predicted, *was resigned, and even taking a sort of secret pleasure in the*

scallops and dots she was fashioning on a flannel petticoat. Every now and then she would pause in her work and hand it over for inspection. Sometimes Giacinta would shake her head disapprovingly, rip out the dot and watch Margaret do it over, as everything must be very neat for the little one. Margaret thought her very particular, she was impatient to finish it and see how it would look laid away between dried rose-leaves in a drawer upstairs with a few other tiny garments.

"Signora *mia*, take more pains," Giacinta would say coaxingly; "it is such fine stuff we will keep this for his baptism. We will make a real *festa* that day. Lisa shall bake a great cake all over frosting; I will show her the kind, you shall see."

Then Margaret would be silent for a time, thinking perhaps how an archbishop had baptized her sister's first baby in his christening-robe of real lace, and of the elaborate supper served. How different things were between herself and Josephine! She never heard her own language now, and often said laughingly that she would soon forget how to speak it. Though perfectly happy, she felt utterly out of the world; hunters, shepherds, quarrymen, and charcoal burners were the only people who frequented the mountain; it was not the season for travelers, and visitors were unheard of. And the silence would continue until a big log in the fireplace would fall away from the others, sending out a shower of red sparks, and Giacinta would move back her chair quickly, take up a primitive broom of twigs bound together, and brush back the red-hot ashes.

In after years whenever Margaret would perceive the faint, pleasant odor of cedar, this room and the objects it contained would rise before her, and the uneventful hours that she had passed in it, and the eventful ones that were to come, had their memories — happy, sweet, tragic — all centered there.

Meanwhile, Leone would be writing verses. He had arranged a studio for himself, and had a good-sized scaldino filled with live charcoal near him, and although he could see his *breath as he wrote*, he did not mind the chilly atmosphere in

the least; it suited his warm young blood and he would be miserable crouching beside a fire as Margherita did.

The magazine published in Florence accepted a great deal that he sent, but paid the merest trifle, yet it gave him occupation and encouragement, and Fauvel believed in his ability and that it would develop as he developed.

Leone was neither industrious nor ambitious by nature, and was quite contented with the "*dolce-far-niente*," but now the thought that he was soon to become a father had aroused him.

He wished to be a famous poet so that his child might be proud of him, and he was working at his manuscripts in thorough earnest. Already he saw on imaginary book-shelves handsomely bound volumes entitled "Poetical Works of Belmonte."

The year was drawing to a close, and with it came the great Festivals of the Church.

On the Feast of the Immaculate Conception Giacinta reminded Margaret that they attended mass together the previous year in Rome, but no notice was taken of the day at the castle. Giacinta was surprised upon her first coming that no one but Lisa ever went to mass. The village was three miles away by the winding road and had no parish priest, but below in the valley there was a Monastery Chapel, belonging to Dominican monks, who looked after the spiritual welfare of the scattered inhabitants of the mountainside. She learned from the servants that the *padrone* never went to church and that there was no communication between the monastery and the castle, and as for the Signor Belmonte, he had such a dislike for the clergy that if he saw a priest or a monk on the road, or in the village, he would turn out of his way to avoid him.

This troubled the pious Giacinta. She had taken a great liking to the young master, and wondered how any one with his sweet nature and beautiful face could be so godless, and it grieved her that Margaret also had apparently grown callous, when now of all times a woman needed to be faithful to her religion. The twelfth of December was the anniversary of

the meeting of Leone and Margaret. In the afternoon he persuaded her to take a walk, and upon their return he pointed to the cold, yellow sun now low in the heavens and said: "It was just at this hour one year ago that we met. I looked into your eyes, Margherita, and you looked into mine, and at once we loved each other, at once, *amore!*"

"Yes," she answered, "and when I went back to the house I thought you were a dream. I had the rose that you left in the Gesù when we knelt together. I still have that rose, Leone."

"And we both thought we would never see each other again, but I loved you from that first moment."

"I too," she said, "though I did not realize it."

There was silence for a moment, then she added musingly: "Where will we be this time next year, I wonder?"

"Here," he said, "right here"; then, very tenderly, "thou, and I and the little one."

Margaret sighed.

She could not look forward to the birth of this child with any of the gladness that he did. With him it was just another beautiful link in their rose-chain. They had dropped out of the world to dwell together in love, and that a child should be born to them was only as it should be. Here again they failed to understand each other. It was the temperamental difference.

The country was now white with snow as the days sped on toward Christmas. Fauvel, who had been in Rome since November, sent a big box of nougat and chocolates, with "*Buon' Natale.*"

Margaret sighed as she listened to the monastery bells which reached them through the clear, frosty air, ring out the glad tidings of the Nativity. She thought of her mother and sister; how Josephine and her lawfully wedded husband could go to mass together with light hearts this holy day. She thought of her dead father, and the merry Christmas parties they had had when he was living. He had been a convert to the Roman Catholic faith, and a loyal follower of its teachings to the day

of his death. She wondered if he could see her now, her dear father, who only knew her as a little, innocent girl . . .

Just then Leone entered the room, and she threw herself into his arms, sobbing, and clinging to him. He was all she had in the world, and she needed something strong to lean upon at that moment.

"Heart's dearest, what is it, what is it?"

"It is Christmas, Leone," she sobbed, "Christmas."

"And a week from to-day will be New Year's, treasure mine; what of it?"

She raised her head from his shoulder. "Listen," she said, "to the bells—" and disengaging herself from his embrace, she went to the window and threw wide open the leaded casement that they might hear more distinctly, "have you forgotten what the bells are saying?" When he saw it was a religious scruple that was troubling her, he took her in his arms again, saying very gently, "God is up here with us, Margherita *mia*, just as much as down there in the monks' cold, cruel chapel. I think He is more here with us than with them, for here there is human love and down there only worn-out creeds."

She turned her face away, for she saw that he had thoroughly imbibed the sentiments of Fauvel, who while bestowing upon him the rarest friendship had completely destroyed his faith. But she loved him desperately, devotedly, now more than ever, while that song the bells sung in her ears made her feel like a lost soul and that she had nothing in heaven or on earth but him.

He knew that she was not yet comforted, so he said in a reverent voice: "Margherita, I can say the 'Gloria in Excelsis Deo' to-day, I, and 'peace on earth to men of good will,' and I understand God better than I did a year ago—because He has brought us together. God is Love."

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE LITTLE ONE

The precious atoms drawn from heaven and earth  
And rocked by Love's own music into form,  
Compacted lived: a soul awaited birth.

BAYARD TAYLOR.

Spring had come. The edges of the paths were purple with violets and between the moss-grown stones little tender ferns were uncurling, the first primroses were in blossom and the Roman hyacinths in the stiff old garden were as blue as the sky.

Every day Margaret and Leone watched the springtime open into fuller glory. The song birds were returning, and they were awakened at dawn by the happy notes of the starling and the woodlark. Gay creeping things clustered about the trunks of somber pines and cypresses, narcissus bloomed close to the castle walls and the honeysuckle wound itself in playful garlands around the dignified columns of the loggia.

Leone's whole nature seemed to respond to the rejoicing of Spring. He was overflowing with life and health and spirits. He would take long rambles on the mountains, with no companion but his happy thoughts and often run like a boy, chasing the wild goats and their kids that were cropping the new grass, then stop suddenly and say aloud to them: "This time next year I too will have a little one out with me — I." Fauvel had arrived. The stout wagon had been sent to Perugia to meet him and had brought himself and his luggage to Rocca Serrata for the summer.

Fauvel had gone off for a few hours' shooting, but he would keep within hearing of a gun-shot, and if he were needed Leone was to fire his rifle three times and he would return, for the latter would not be persuaded to leave Margaret and only went

on his long walks when she was taking her nap, but he could not keep still and had foregone his dignity as the "young signore" and invited Beppo to join him in a game of ball.

Margaret was taking her customary morning walk, leaning on the motherly arm of Giacinta, with whom she felt less nervous than with Leone, who was so full of life he could hardly measure his dancing steps to her slow time.

Giacinta had led the signora to a marble bench where she sat down to rest and watch Lisa and Armida, a scullery maid, with a basket of linen between them which they were carrying out to bleach. Margaret spoke to them pleasantly as they stopped in front of her and began to spread the articles upon the grass, while Lisa asked respectfully how she was feeling.

"The last few days are very weary ones, signora," the woman said, "but to-night the moon is full and almost always an expected child comes on the full moon; I think it will not be long now — the signora has the look —"

"My grandmother says," put in Armida, a raw mountain peasant who did not know her place, "that it is very unlucky to give birth on the full moon —"

"*Mache!*" said Giacinta scornfully. Giacinta was city-bred and educated and had little faith in the superstitions of the *contadini*.

"Oh," cried Margaret, grasping Giacinta's arm, "what does she say?" She could not always understand the rough Umbrian dialect, but she had caught the sense of their words.

"Stop your foolish talk," cried Giacinta to the girl, "you are frightening the signora."

"I frighten the signora," exclaimed Armida indignantly, "no, no; not for gold! But it is well for all Christians to be prepared."

In the afternoon when Fauvel returned with a string of birds tied to his rifle, Leone ran out to meet him, crying: "Meurice, Meurice, my son will soon be here."

After dinner that evening Leone came downstairs looking for Fauvel, whom he found smoking on the terrace. He was angered. He did not see how Fauvel could be so calm and unconcerned while such an important event was about to take place.

"Meurice," he said, "she is in great distress."

"Yes," said Fauvel, "I suppose she is."

"But, Meurice, I thought it was the part of a physician to relieve suffering."

"So it is when there is any known remedy; but I know of nothing for her but patience and fortitude. She has both."

Fauvel had become very fond of Margaret. He had watched her closely in the year or more that he had known her, looking for flaws but finding none. Sensible, sweet, refined and unselfish he had found her always, and with a wonderful control over Leone whenever he was inclined to be childish or unreasonable.

Leone went into the house again but soon returned. Fauvel was still walking up and down, watching the stars come out and reveling in the sweet, pure air after the heat and odors of Rome.

"She is no better, Meurice," he said miserably.

"Of course not. She will be much worse before she can hope to be better. I am going up to see her as soon as I've finished this cigar."

"Will it be soon?" Leone asked nervously, after Fauvel returned from his visit to Margaret.

"No; probably not until after midnight."

About ten o'clock Fauvel went upstairs again, stretched himself on a couch in Leone's room, took from his pocket a comic French magazine, and set the lamp beside him.

Leone was not used to the sight of suffering and it completely unnerved him. He had looked forward to the coming of his child with delight, but he had never comprehended this side of *it*, and to feel that he could do nothing for Margherita and that

Fauvel apparently would not, was more than he could bear. The comic pictures and Fauvel being amused by them at such a time, made his blood boil.

"Meurice," he said sharply, "must she suffer like this for hours and hours?"

"Probably."

"Is there nothing you can do for her?"

"No."

He paced up and down the room for a few moments, digging his nails into the palms of his hands, then he stopped in front of the couch.

"Are you sure, Meurice, that you understand the case? It is so long since you've treated any one but peasants that — perhaps —"

Fauvel was thoroughly provoked. He threw down the magazine, and, standing up, said:

"Signor Belmonte, if you are not satisfied with my services you are at liberty to call in another physician."

"Oh, Meurice," Leone cried, "forgive me! Don't remind me of my debt, of my helplessness! I don't mean to be rude or ungrateful, only it makes me frantic to watch her suffer."

"Don't watch her," said Fauvel shortly; "go downstairs and read, go out on the terrace with your guitar. I am right here any moment she wants me, and with your permission I will make myself comfortable, for I do not expect to go to my own room to-night. Everything is going well," he added more gently, "and Margherita has confidence in me if you have not; and if you had twenty doctors they could do nothing at present, so control yourself, Estori."

When Fauvel called him by that name, it was a sure sign he was angry. The younger man looked at the older one for a second, then rushed from the room, and Fauvel thought he heard sobs outside in the corridor.

"What can I do for you, signora?" asked Giacinta of Margaret, who was rocking herself back and forth on a chair.

"Nothing, dear, good, precious Giacinta; you are such a comfort to me. Do not mind me, just let me alone."

Giacinta had some crocheting in her hands, for she was never idle, and her work lay around always where she could pick it up at odd moments.

The big lamps that Fauvel had ordered Clemente to bring up made an oily smell (they seldom burned anything but candles in the bed chambers), and Margaret rose and went over to a long window at the farther end of the room and stepped out upon a little stone balcony to breathe the fresh air.

The perfume of syringa and honeysuckle came up from below. What a superb night it was! The stars were paling in the light of the great silvery disc that was rising behind the dark mountains. It was the full moon, coming to watch her fate, and when a few hours hence it would vanish before Aurora and her fiery steeds and sink down out of sight into the peaceful valley, would she too sink down — into the "Valley of the Shadow of Death?" The moon would rise again, but would she? She gazed out over the stretch of country, whitening as the moon rose higher; away over at the West lay the sea, and beyond it was — her home. What were her mother and sister doing, she wondered. Little they thought how she was spending the night. She wanted her mother now, more than she had ever wanted her before. Josephine had had their mother there when her children were born. Well, she must not give in to morbid thoughts, she was going to be brave; but it was too lonely out here with the birds and flowers all asleep; she needed human sympathy, some one to talk to.

She came back into the room. Giacinta's ball of pink worsted was rolling on the floor, her work had dropped in her lap, and she was dozing in her chair. She would not disturb her, she would talk to Fauvel.

The door between the rooms was slightly ajar; she pushed it open. Fauvel had fallen asleep on the couch, the magazine still *in his hand*. She would let him rest too; he was so kind, so

thoughtful of her, that she would not be selfish with him. Leone, where was he? He was her own, her love, she needed him, she must be comforted. She stepped out into the corridor looking for him, and went on toward the tower stairs. Some one was lying upon the last step; as she tried to see who it was the light from the rising moon broke through a window above and streamed down in a silver bar across the face she loved. He too slept.

She bent over him. On his long curling lashes were tear drops. He had been crying for her, she knew, and had sobbed himself to sleep like a child. He could relieve his feelings by giving way to tears, and they had brought him blessed oblivion — but she?

The brief respite was over and the pain was coming on again. She leaned against the wall and thought of the contrast between them, as she looked at him in his calm and lovely repose. The beautiful features, purified in the moonlight, appeared chiseled out of marble. He had thrown himself into a graceful pose, with his head pillowed upon an arm that rested on the step above. It was less than a year ago, that dream-like night when they had both been clothed in white and he had led her up this tower stair, and they had no thought of anything but the ecstasy of being together once more.

Bodily anguish made her long to pray for herself, but how could she ask anything of God when at her feet lay one she had stolen from His church! In the beginning she had encouraged "Fra Felice"; she had deliberately gone back and searched on the Palatine to find him a second time; and from there on, until they had met in the faded saloon below she had been tempted by his wondrous beauty. But for her he would be now living honorably in his community. No, she could not pray for herself; for him, yes, but not for herself.

Leone slept on, unconscious of her presence. She was hurt and wounded that he could not keep up with her during these hours. She was going to waken him roughly and tell him how

selfish he was, and then — what was the use, she thought, he could not understand why the birth of their child should make her unhappy, so how could he understand this mixture of mental and physical agony, both so intense that she could hardly tell which was the crueler?

No, let him sleep; how could he know — what man could ever know! Ah, there was one Man who knew, who long ago had spent a night alone in a solitary garden in Palestine, whose companions, like hers, had all fallen asleep; one Man who was divine, as well as human, who knew and understood mentally and physically every living creature, who was compassionate, merciful and forgiving, who had said: "Come unto me all ye that travail and are heavily laden —" He did not say, "Come unto me all ye good people," or "all ye who are keeping my commandments," but He had said, "all — all — every one" — and raising her arms toward the glory from His heaven that was shining down upon her, she prayed as she had done before she ever heard of "Fra Felice," or known the meaning of sorrow, heart-ache, or guilt.

In the cold gray of the morning twilight Leone Estori knelt beside the great canopied bed where the girl he worshipped lay with her eyes closed, like a white flower that had been bruised and beaten by a storm. He put his arms gently around her and whispered, "*Amore mio*." She opened her eyes and whispered back "*Amore*."

"Show her her son," said Fauvel. Fauvel looked haggard but triumphant, as he placed something wrapped in a blanket in Leone's trembling arms. Leone felt a thrill pass through his whole frame as he touched his child and looked into the tiny face that had Margaret's strange little wistful expression; then still trembling for fear of dropping it, he held it down for her to see — "*Amore*, thy son, and mine."

But Margaret turned away her head and burst into a torrent of weeping. Leone handed the child to Giacinta, and tried to comfort her. He could not understand it, nor could any one

in the room understand the English words that escaped with the sobs. "Oh, my mother, my mother, my sister — I can never go home again; oh, mother, mother!"

Her sobs become more and more hysterical; her body, already worn and racked, was shaking with the violence of her emotion.

Fauvel came and took her hand. "Margherita — *ma chère* — *mon enfant*," he said, falling into his native French, as he often did when speaking to her alone, "this must stop; you must stop crying, it is all over and you will soon feel better; there is nothing to cry for now. Stop, stop, *ma chère*."

"Oh, Signora, *cara mia*," said Giacinta, "do not weep. The *bambino* is so strong, and fair and perfect as the day;" but Margaret kept her head turned away from them and cried the harder. Leone looked helplessly from her to the child; then to Fauvel. What was the matter?

Fauvel spoke again: "Margherita, I shall be very cross with you if you do not stop. You have been so brave, *la vaillante*! You will injure yourself; you must keep quiet." But she was deaf to his words and her weeping got more and more beyond control.

"Margherita," said Leone desperately, "have you no welcome for our son?"

Fauvel was perplexed. She seemed absolutely lacking in motherly instinct. She must take her child, she must be made to take it.

He went over to where Giacinta had retreated with the repulsed infant and was crooning over it, to make up for its mother's coldness; he unfolded its blanket and taking hold of its tender, plump arm, gave it a quick pinch. It uttered a sharp little cry and began to wail. The violent sobbing in the bed suddenly ceased.

"Oh," Margaret cried, "is it hurt, the baby? Oh, let me see — let me see. It is my baby, mine — mine — after all!"

Fauvel put the child in her outstretched arms. She saw a

little head covered with soft, dark down, and below, wee doll-like features, and then she held it close in a tight embrace.

"Ah," said Fauvel, in a tone of satisfaction, "I thought so."

An hour later there was complete silence in the great state chamber where princes and dukes in their time had been born. Mother and child had comforted each other, and both lay resting. Giacinta had stolen off to tell the news to the servants, and Fauvel had gone to his own apartments to refresh himself with a drip absinthe, while Leone sat in a sort of trance watching his loved ones. Outside, too, all was still in the hush of early dawn. The fresh morning air blew in and stirred the faded window curtains, then a wood-lark piped a few sweet notes and the sun rose, brightening the dingy drapery on the old hearse-like bed where Margaret Randolph and her infant were sleeping.

And Leone sat on, scarcely daring to move for fear of waking them, and marveling at the mystery and tragedy of birth.

\* \* \* \* \*

The little one grew and thrived and was so strong and healthy that by the end of a year Fauvel called him "a hardy mountaineer."

He had his father's glorious eyes, though they were dark, not golden, and his mother's white skin. He had sweet, cherubic features, with a lovely, innocent smile, and Leone often remarked it, and spoke of it to Margaret, that their child bore a striking resemblance to the little Greek statue of "Eros" that he had admired for so long in his underground retreat in the old monastery on the Palatine.

Leone had seized upon Clemente and his keys, and in a forgotten lumber room he had come across what Margaret had been wishing for, a cradle. It was of ancient, massive design, gilded in its day. He had made Beppo carry it out of doors, take off what seemed to be the dust of centuries, wash it in *clean spring water*, and leave it in the sun to dry. Giacinta

found an old lace curtain which she mended and laundered, then manufactured a small mattress and pillow, and the cradle, freshened in its old age, was occupied once more. Margaret tried to be pleased, they had both taken such pains; but she could not help contrasting the great clumsy thing with the dainty "bassinette" that Josephine had had for little Phil.

Leone idolized the child, and as soon as it was able to leave its mother at night, he had the cradle brought into his own room and the little one slept quietly beside him. He played with it and amused it all day and kept it out of doors with him, and the child soon learned that it could impose on its father where its mother would not give in. Margaret was both proud and ashamed of it, always fearful that some of their friends might find their way to the castle and discover her with her child. On the other hand, she longed to show him off, for she had pride in his beauty, and she knew that he was far handsomer than either of her sister's children. It seemed hardly possible, she thought, that this lovely, foreign-looking child should be own cousin to little flaxen-haired Phil and Alice.

The "Belmontes" named their son "Meurice," after Fauvel, though they spoke of him as the "*bambino*" or "little one," and his father always called him "*Amore*," for was he not the offspring of his own love and the living image of the marble Cupid?

Sometimes when Margaret would ask, "When is the child going to be baptized?" he would answer in his happy, careless way, "There is time."

This was a source of distress to Giacinta, and she often thought of secretly carrying the child down to the monastery for baptism; but its parents were never away long enough for her to undertake it.

Often Leone would sit with the boy in his arms and dream over his future. Perhaps he was destined to become a famous man, why not? He had in his veins the energetic, progressive blood of the new country, mixed with his own ancient and

noble stock; and while his father was musing thus his mother was thinking "whatever shall we do with him when he grows up?" And sometimes when she had him all to herself, the child would raise his great wondering eyes to hers as if asking some question, and she would say, "Don't look at me like that, baby;" for some day might he not say with his lips, "Why was I born?"

She was quite domestic and liked to learn from Giacinta how to make pretty things for him out of odds and ends of her own. At first he had been clothed in swaddling bands as the children of the peasants are, but when these were laid aside Giacinta showed her how to make little kid shoes from the tops of long evening gloves that were lying useless in her big trunk, and stitch them together prettily with colored silks, and she became an expert in the small footwear she contrived. But he began to walk earlier than most children, and then his mother's handiwork was too dainty for his restless, romping feet. There was never a happier baby born. He would scream with delight at a bird or a butterfly, and try to catch them, ending with a tumble that never hurt him. He went into infantile ecstasies over the flowers, being like his father in his intensity and every day grew sweeter in his pretty baby ways.

Margaret continued to write home cheerful, contented letters, and to inquiring friends her mother and sister would reply that she had a delightful position, where she was just like one of the family and was so happy in Italy that she never spoke of coming back to America.

Fauvel had given up his studio in Rome and made his headquarters at Perugia, so he often found his way back to the castle. He loved Perugia because there he said one could have "the picturesque, the mediæval, and the ancient, without the squalor."

His great picture of "Youth" had been finished and was now on exhibition in Paris, where it was exciting unusual admiration, both for the skill of the artist and for its remarkable

type of juvenile masculine beauty. He had had several fine offers for it, but did not intend to part with it until he had another life-size painting of Leone ready for the public eye, and he was considering one which he should call "Springtime," but for this he needed a female figure as well. He had taken the other picture, "A Street Musician," to his studio in Perugia, where it was bought for a fancy price by an English nobleman.

Leone's time was not his own when Fauvel was at home, for there were long, tedious hours of sittings; besides, Fauvel liked him to go shooting and to accompany him on short tours about the country, which was partly Roman and partly Etruscan, and Fauvel, who was something of an archæologist, delighted to explore the little mediæval mountain towns, and Leone's knowledge of Greek and Latin was a great assistance to him in his study of their ancient inscriptions. But Leone was no scholar from choice and these trips often bored him. But on the whole he enjoyed the visits of Fauvel, and to Margaret they were like echoes from the outside world, in which they had no part.

The only excitement she had was occasionally driving to Fossato, which was a sort of link between themselves and modern civilization, and she would watch the Adriatic Express come steaming in from the Capital, and try to catch a glimpse of the tourist passengers to see what the styles were in the big cities, and then watch it steam off again, to pierce the Apennines by a succession of tunnels until it reached the sea. And when it was gone they would let the horses climb the ascent to the battlemented old town and do what little shopping the place offered.

Margaret was naturally graceful and perfectly proportioned, and had become decidedly pretty. It was hard to believe that she was twenty-one and a mother; she could easily have passed for sixteen, and Fauvel told himself he would not be surprised to see her a truly beautiful woman by thirty, if she kept her splendid health. It was remarkable to him to find that she was not the fond mother he had expected. She was sweet and

gentle and womanly, but motherhood did not seem to touch her — she was still like a young girl. While most careful about her child's health and comfort, keeping him as fresh as a rose, she was lacking in that tenderness which most young mothers shower upon their babies. Hers was more like the affection of an older sister for a baby brother; all the mother-instinct had apparently passed over her head and gone to Leone. It was his father who idolized and worshipped the little one, and who would watch him playing or sleeping with all a mother's tenderness as well as a father's pride.

Margaret continued to be all devotion to Leone, but when she saw him going off with Fauvel and the two men enjoying each other's society, she would often express the wish for a girl friend, and so came about a momentous advent: when Carlotta Santi was introduced at the castle.

Carlotta was the only child of the village postmaster, "Sor Taddeo," the peasants called him, out of profound respect. She was educated far beyond her station. Her mother's people were well off and they had never forgiven their daughter for running away and marrying the handsome Taddeo Santi, whom they considered beneath her, as he was only a letter carrier, while they owned and kept a profitable restaurant. But when Carlotta was born, late in the life of her parents, her mother's family relented, took the girl to their own home in Perugia, and gave her many advantages. Her mother died, Santi's health failed, and he drifted back to his native mountain hamlet with his savings, where he was regarded as a sort of superior personage and became a public letter writer, and afterwards was made notary and postmaster.

Carlotta had a pretty voice, and sang at the concert halls and cafés through Umbria; besides, she was beautiful, with the rare beauty of the Italian blonde. Her hair was the color of a goldfish, her skin the tint of a pink shell, and her eyes were like sapphires. In manner she appeared extremely well and Margaret became interested in her, and, longing for companionship

of her own age and sex, it ended in Carlotta being invited to the castle to sing; and Fauvel, after looking around for some weeks for a female model who should be the exact opposite of Leone in his picture of "Springtime," came to the conclusion that he could not find anything better than the fairness of Carlotta as a foil to Leone. She was a little taller and of larger build than he wanted, and her features were a trifle too heavy and gave a suggestion of sensuality, but he could eliminate that in his painting and idealize, for her coloring was exquisite.

And so it was arranged that she should stay three days a week at the castle and pose with the young Signor Belmonte. Fauvel asked the consent of Santoni before he even spoke to Carlotta; he liked the old man, but Carlotta did not love her father. She was ashamed of him, and her annual visits were a great bore and purely a matter of duty. But she came regularly every summer, for "papa" would have a neat sum saved up when he died, and if he thought she did not care for him the monks would get it.

But this year she was not at all bored, for reasons best known to herself; she even considered staying on through the autumn, nor did she find the hours spent in Fauvel's studio tedious or long.

Leone was provoked that Margaret could not be in the picture with him; she was the fairest creature in the world in his eyes and it would be so beautiful to be painted together, their own love story put on canvas, and when Carlotta as the second figure was proposed he had at first rebelled. How could he pose beside her in an attitude of loving admiration, when he did not see anything in her to admire?

One afternoon, when Leone had chosen a costume of white Grecian drapery from among what he called his "theatrical wardrobe," donned it with a very bad grace and gone to the studio to be excessively bored, Margaret was walking down a garden path reading a letter, while the baby toddled in front of her. The letter was from her mother and it told her that

Cousin Cornelia Ward was visiting them at Josephine's country home on Long Island, and that she had asked all about Margaret's position and friends in Italy, and really spoke of her with interest. "I should not be surprised if you heard from her some day," Mrs. Randolph wrote. "I know that Wallace Grant disapproved of her dropping you. He is in New York a great deal now; Phil sees him frequently, and says he always speaks of you in such a sweet, kind way. Oh, dear little daughter, what a pity *that* could not have been—" The rest of the letter was taken up with Josephine's children, and her week-end parties.

Margaret had been so intent upon the letter that she had paid no attention to the child and was startled upon looking up to find that he had disappeared. A few yards off was an opening in the tall boxwood hedge that inclosed the garden and she darted towards it, but before she reached it there was a little frightened cry, and the child came hurrying back, tumbling down in his eagerness to get to her. She picked him up, stood him upon his feet to make sure he was unhurt, then looked through the opening to see what could have startled him. She could have screamed herself. Crouching behind the bushes was a creature more like a beast than a man. His head was abnormally large, with a monstrous jaw, small black beady eyes and a long tangled beard that reached nearly to his knees. His ears stuck out like great sounding-boards, and his face was covered with hairy warts. He was a dwarf, no larger than a child of ten or twelve years, his shoulders were broad and his arms appeared powerful, but his legs were short, with large flat feet upon which he wore "*the ciocce*," or rags bound with thongs. He carried an implement that resembled a miner's pick and his clothing was made of goat skins. He straightened himself upon seeing Margaret and pulled off his shaggy cap.

"Who are you," she asked quickly, "and what do you want *here*?"

"Gentilissima signora," he began, "good and gracious lady, esteemed and generous —"

"That will do," said Margaret, who had learned to check the palaver of the peasants, "tell me what you want!"

"Esteemed signora, with your noble permission I would like to enter."

"Whom do you want to see?" she asked.

"No one; I only want to come in."

"But this is private property —"

"There are many openings, *eccellenza*."

"Yes, the walls are broken through in many places and the courtyard gate is never closed. The *padrone* is very kind about giving permission to those who come and ask to see the castle and the grounds; that is a different matter. Have you not seen the signs, '*No trespassing*'?"

"Alas, Signora, I cannot read."

"And this hedge incloses our own private garden and in all the time I have lived here you are the only one who has ever attempted to enter, and," she added, "you have frightened my baby," for the little one had come up to her and was hiding his face in her dress.

"Ah, what a beautiful *bambino*, what a little angel!"

Margaret lifted the baby in her arms. "You must go now," she said; "if there was any good reason for your coming you would have gone around to the courtyard and rung the bell," and grasping the child tightly, she turned away. But the dwarf followed her, and touched her arm with his dirty horny hand.

"Signora," he whispered, "I come honestly. I will swear it by the Madonna. Ah, you who are rich and beautiful, have pity on a poor wretch who is only trying to make a few *soldi*\* to buy bread to live upon. *Senta*, signora, listen; do not turn from me. I ask only to be permitted to dig for some medicinal plants which I know I can find here. See, *eccellenza*" — he

\* Coppers.

opened a canvas sack that was strung across his shoulder and displayed some wilted weeds — "I dig for certain herbs which I understand, and sell them to the apothecaries; it is the only way I have to make a living, for poor Ferruccio is so ugly no one will employ him; *per l'amore di Dio* permit me to stay!"

"But," said Margaret, "there are no herbs here in the garden."

"The Signora is right, but over there, away over by the walls, the wild cucumber and henbane, and caper plant are to be found, near old stones. Does the Signora permit me to go?"

"Well," she said hesitatingly, for a story of poverty and distress always touched her, "I suppose so. The *padrone* is busy indoors, and never likes to be disturbed at these times, or I would ask him for you; but I do not think he will have any objection," and as she got a better look at the grotesque creature it seemed to her that he had an honest, harmless expression. And he, thanking her profusely, limped off in the direction of the ruins.

"Precious lamb," said Margaret to the baby, "I don't wonder you were frightened. He is gone now" — for the little one had buried his face in her neck and would not look up. He was naturally very shy, as he rarely saw any one but their own household. "He is gone, *Amore* sweet, and mother will not let the dirty man touch her precious baby, never fear," and she gazed with delight into the little frightened face that met hers, which looked lovelier than ever after that of the dwarf. Then she hugged him closer to her and kissed him, and releasing him, let him play and pull all the flowers he wanted, and when he was tired she took him to the fountain to splash his little hands in the low basin where the water overflowed from the ancient sarcophagus above.

But Margaret was not quite at ease about the odd creature who called himself "Ferruccio"; she was not sure whether Fauvel would approve of what she had done and was relieved

linner, when she told of her adventure, that he did not deem it of enough importance to make any comment. He had run across numerous hideous deformities in the mountain villages, said, and the specimens mentioned were apt to grow about stones as this poor wretch claimed. Then the subject was dropped and no more was thought of the incident.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### "THE EVIL EYE"

Be thou a spirit of health, or goblin damned,  
Bring with thee airs from Heaven, or blasts from Hell,  
Be thy intents wicked, or charitable —  
. . . I will speak with thee.

HAMLET

About a week later Leone, Margaret and Carlotta were walking together just at sunset; they had wandered around by the ruins and had paused to look at the old well. There was a big block of stone, which for years had remained balanced halfway over the edge of the circular opening, and Leone was saying he would like to push it in and listen how far they could hear it go down.

"Yes, do it, Signore; it will be fun to scare the fishes," urged Carlotta. But Margaret objected: "It is fearfully heavy, Leone," she said; "you will strain yourself; do not attempt it." Just then they heard close to them a noise like blows of a hammer. They stopped talking and listened. In a moment the sound was repeated.

"Some one must be around the other side of the tower," said Leone; "let us go and see; walk softly."

The path was so overgrown that their footsteps made no sound and as they turned the corner they perceived a creature on his knees, trying to pull out a loose stone from the base of the wall; beside him, with one point stuck in the ground, was a pick axe and a spade lay near by. Margaret recognized him at once, the enormous head, the shaggy goatskin clothes and the short legs. She clutched Leone's arm. "It is he — the dwarf," she said; "I told you he followed me into the garden a week ago when baby and I were alone —"

He had evidently attacked the wall with his pick and had *loosened the stone*, but his arms were not strong enough to dis-

place it, so he turned to take up the implement again to give it another blow.

"*Hola!*" cried Leone indignantly. "What do you do there?"

The creature jumped at being suddenly surprised, then collected himself and recognizing Margaret began to bow obsequiously. "Ah, gentle ladies, and you, Signore, poor Ferruccio humbly salutes you."

Carlotta gave a scream, and Leone actually started at the hideous countenance that faced them.

"Answer my question," said Leone: "what are you doing?"

"Pardon, noble Signore, the gentle and beautiful Signora has given me permission to come here. Is it not true?" he added appealingly to Margaret.

"I said you might stay the other day," she replied, "but I did not expect you to come again; and then you asked to be allowed to dig for herbs."

"Yes, yes, I do the same to-day —"

"That's a lie!" cried Leone. "You are trying to break in a wall."

"Esteemed Signore, I search for a tiny plant that takes root between the stones. It is valued by the apothecaries — I sell it to them — the Signora will explain; I had permission."

"Be off," he said roughly, "you had no permission to injure property. Be off, and do not return."

The dwarf reluctantly picked up his things, making a great point of putting into his sack some plants and roots that were lying on the ground, then Leone pointed imperatively to him to go, and he slunk away, disappearing through some shrubbery that had grown up between a space of the disconnected wall that enclosed the grounds.

"What a horrible creature," said Carlotta, shuddering; "he makes me quite faint. He has the 'evil eye'; some misfortune will happen," and she crossed herself.

"You are right, Signorina," said Leone soberly; "he is surely

the *jettatura*—ah, *Dio mio!* Something bad will happen," and he fixed his left hand into a pair of horns, by putting out his first and little fingers, while holding tightly the second and third in the palm with his thumb, a gesture that is supposed to ward off disastrous consequences. Carlotta did likewise.

Margaret was astonished; not at Carlotta who was flighty and belonged to the people, but that Leone, with his education and birth, should be so foolishly superstitious she would not have believed. She regarded them rather scornfully.

"How absurd you are!" she said. "He is only a poor deformed peasant whom fate has been hard upon. I am sorry for him."

"I am not," said Carlotta; "he frightens me to death. Soul of my mother! I am ill; let us go to the house, I must have some wine. Did you not see the look he cast at us, Signora? Ah, *misericordia*, evil follows us! They tell strange stories in the village about the ruins of Rocca Serrata. Come, let us get away from here," and she took Leone's arm and tried to make him run with her.

"Come," he said, holding out his hand to Margaret.

But she did not stir. "This is sheer nonsense," she declared; "there is no occasion to hurry, I shall not be so silly."

"Margherita, come!" said Leone. Carlotta was still pulling at his arm. "Come with me, I say," and there was a touch of authority in his voice. It was the first time he had ever used such a tone to her. She resented it and drew back.

"I shall not," she said flatly, and, turning round, began to walk towards the tower.

He disengaged himself from Carlotta's grasp and followed her. "Margherita," he said firmly, "why do you not do as I tell you?"

"Because I am an American and I don't believe in such idiocy!"

He flushed angrily; then said coldly: "Wives should obey *their husbands*."

“I am not your wife.”

“Oh, Margherita!” he cried. “Margherita!”

“Well, I will not be spoken to like that when I know that I am right.”

“Are you coming?” called out Carlotta nervously.

“I wait for the Signora,” he called back; “go on, we will follow;” then turning to Margaret: “Why do you wound me with such words? Forgive me if I was rude, *cara mia*, but I understand this thing better than you. There is no doubt but that some people work us evil. Intuition tells me this dwarf will, it tells the same to Carlotta. I cannot explain it, but it is a fact that has been proven over and over again, that trouble comes whenever the ‘evil eye’ appears.”

“Leone,” she said, softening, “I did not mean to hurt you, but I lost patience, for at home only common, ignorant people believe in such stuff. I will come now, not because you ordered me,” she added, smiling, “but because I love you — you foolish boy!”

And Carlotta, glancing back, saw Signor Belmonte take his Signora, who had defied him, in his arms and kiss her.

“He ought to slap her,” she muttered to herself, and at the first opportunity that presented she teased him for being bullied by his American wife.

When they reported to Fauvel that the dwarf had trespassed again he said he would make inquiries about him in the neighboring towns; he was quite sure he was not known in their own village. “I will not answer for his life, if he goes battering about the north tower; the stones drop continually and one could easily be killed. If he is seen here again bring him to me, I will interview him.” But later, when the two men were alone, Fauvel said: “An idea has occurred to me concerning this dwarf, which I do not think wise to mention before the women. I do not believe the fellow is after roots at all. The ordinary peasant who digs for roots does not carry a spade and pick axe; a small sharp knife and trowel are all they

require. There may be some significance in his hanging around the ruins, but I do not wish a word of what I say repeated, it would alarm the household, and at best it is only a surmise."

"I am a tomb of silence, Meurice; go on."

"It may be possible that he is trying to get inside the house, and his digging is only a blind."

"But all he has to do is to walk in," said Leone; "at this season every door is open, he could watch his chance and slip in without ever being noticed. Do you think he means to steal?"

"No, not ordinary thieving, and it does not suit his purpose to enter the house in the ordinary way."

"What can you mean? You have me all curiosity."

"I may as well tell you everything about Rocca Serrata, since you are to inherit it in case I die before you do."

"Meurice, I wish you would not speak of that —"

"Stop," said Fauvel, putting up his hand; "that is all settled; now listen. Near where you discovered the dwarf to-day is an entrance to a secret passage leading to an apartment cleverly hidden in the thickness of the walls. I have heard that these Umbrian peasants are very wonderful about their ancestry. They can date back as far as some of the most ancient nobility. They know the traditions of the family in which they live, and they pass them down from father to son. Now it is possible that the ancestors of this dwarf may once have been employed here, knew of the secret apartment and that something valuable was hidden there; that the story has been told to the dwarf, who believes the treasure is still here and has come for it. He may be a mason by trade and trying to locate the passage by removing the outer stones to make soundings for hollow places; in its ruinous state this would not be difficult; then he means to break through, find the room where the supposed or actual treasure is, and carry it off through the secret passage."

"It sounds like a yellow paper novel, Meurice. I would

never give such an idea a moment's consideration if any one but yourself had suggested it. But you are usually right in your deductions. Why not have the fellow arrested at once?"

"How can I? I have no charge. I may be altogether wrong."

"How did you know about this passage?"

"My poor friend Gastonet gathered as much while looking over the archives which are in Fossato, when he bought the property. Gastonet was an architect, you know, and made a special study of old castles and fortresses and he located and discovered the passage."

"Where is it?"

"In the north wing. When Gastonet first bought this place he had a raft of workmen here, for it was necessary to strengthen floors, beam ceilings, and plaster and fix up generally to make it fit to live in; but it would have cost a fortune to renovate that part, and in fact the expert we had here condemned it, so the communications between it and the livable portions of the house were bricked up."

"So the passage was closed too?"

"No, but now in order to reach those apartments where the concealed entrance to the passage begins, one must go down through the vaults and then ascend by a spiral way that leads from the bottom to the top of the house, opening finally on the battlements."

"Did you and Gastonet go through the passage?"

"Yes."

"Did you find anything there?"

"Yes."

"What?"

"Understand," said Fauvel, lowering his voice, "I do not wish one word of this repeated, not even to Margherita. I will not have unpleasant stories circulated, but I think it best for you to know in case anything regarding it should come up in future."

"I assure you, Meurice, I shall not mention it. Tell me everything. I can keep my own counsel. It is part of the monastic training, you know, to listen to all and to divulge nothing."

"Yes, I know you are very close-mouthed, and it is an excellent trait. I had not considered it worth while until to-day to make you acquainted with this matter; but the appearance of the dwarf and his predilection for the ruins have started a whole train of thought. When Gastonet and I went through the passage by ourselves we discovered the skeleton of a young woman."

"Meurice!" Leone paled and his eyes showed his horror. "How terrible! Who was she?"

"There was nothing to indicate who she was, except upon her arm a bracelet in the form of a serpent, with an emerald sunk in its head and inside engraved 'Lorina.'"

"What did you do with her — poor thing?"

"We gave her decent burial. No one saw or knew; we took good care of that. She was quite young, we could tell by her teeth, which were perfect and beautiful, also from the looks of the small bones. Judging from these and the shreds of clothing, she must have been dead about fifty years."

"Could you find out nothing more?"

"Not much; the castle had changed hands in rapid succession at that period, being thrown back and forth for gambling debts by a notorious set of young reckless Venetians, who took good care that little of what went on here should be known beyond the castle walls, and from the vague bits that are to be learned one of them was accused of murdering his mistress, though it was never proved. For my part, I do not believe the woman was murdered; we found her lying as if asleep; she had probably hurried there to hide from some one and died of heart failure."

"It's not a pretty tale," said Leone thoughtfully, "and the *old dwarf* —"

"May be a link in it."

"I knew he was a thing of evil! Meurice, show me this place, will you, to-morrow?"

"To-night is as good as to-morrow," said Fauvel, "and I need all the daylight to work in." He took out his watch. "It is early yet, and day and night are the same in the vaults and passages."

"Stop a moment; you said it was unsafe?"

"It is in one sense, unsafe for constant use or for a number at a time. Gastonet expected to entertain here a great deal, and guests love to explore, so to avoid risks he had it walled up. But for you or me, neither of us heavyweights, I do not consider there is any danger and I would like to show you the vaults. One could play hide-and-seek there for weeks, they are wonderful, they will endure to the end of time. If you like we will go now. It is bright moonlight and we can get a good look at the handsome old rooms in the north wing. Do you care to come?"

"Of course I do; does Clemente know of this passage?"

"No; no one but myself, now that poor Gastonet is dead. I keep the keys to the iron door of the vaults and to the door in the ruined tower. I will go and get them while you ring for Beppo; tell him to bring two lanterns and be sure they are full, and look about for my electric pocket lamp, will you? It's in the cedar room; I was amusing your son with it before dinner."

Margaret had been asleep for some time when she was awakened by the baby's crying. She waited a moment, expecting his father to speak to him, as he slept in the cradle close to Leone's bed, but no sound came from the other room except the little wakeful whimper. The child was cutting his double teeth and it made him restless. She rose and went in to him with a candle in her hand, which she placed on a night table while she turned his pillow and tried to comfort him.

Leone's bed was undisturbed; where in the world could he

be, and the clock forty minutes past midnight! At that moment he opened the door. He was covered with dust and cobwebs and his face and hands were grimy.

"Mercy!" she exclaimed, "where have you been?"

But he did not answer and came directly over to the cradle.

"Don't come near baby looking like that," she cried, waving him back; "you must be covered with germs."

"Is anything the matter with him?" he asked.

"No, I think not, he's only wakeful."

"I will walk with him, then he goes to sleep."

"No, you must not," she declared. "You spoil him dreadfully; besides, you are too dirty to touch him," looking from the spotless child to its begrimed father.

"What a fuss you make about a little dirt," he said, rather pettishly. "The United States must be full of awful germs since you are so afraid of them. You go into a fit over a little harmless dust."

"The United States are very clean," she retorted; "far cleaner than Italy, and we never allow anything but what is clean and sanitary to come near children. Look at yourself, you're a sight!" pointing to his reflection in the mirror. "Wherever have you been?"

"Meurice and I went down into the vaults; he was showing them to me," he answered. "Yes, *bambino mio*," he called to the fretting child, "thy father comes to thee in three minutes," throwing off his coat and rolling up his shirt sleeves, "thy mother would rather hear thee cry than have one speck harmless dust touch thee. 'Oné comes to thee."

The child had learned to say one word: it's father's name, with the "Le" unpronounced.

"How can you be so cold-hearted?" he said to Margaret, who was trying to soothe the boy in his cradle. "Why don't you take him up? Meurice says a baby's second summer is its hardest time."

"But he is not ill and I don't believe in giving in to him,"

she answered. Leone dashed down the towel and pushing her away took up the child and began to patrol the room.

“You will have him so spoiled,” Margaret said, “that there will be no living with him when he is a little older;” then she went back into her own room, giving the door a slight slam.

It was not long before it was opened and Leone came over to her bed on tiptoe. “Do you sleep, Margherita?” he asked softly.

“No,” she answered; “you sing your lullabys so loud you keep me awake.”

“But he goes to sleep, the little one; I can put him to sleep always when you cannot.”

“You never give me a chance,” she said resentfully; “you took him away from me. He is all your child, not mine at all. I had nothing to do with him, did I?”

“Ah, *Sposina mia*,” he cried, “thou didst give him to me — can I ever forget that? But listen to me, *Amore*, dost remember what I said to thee about that ugly dwarf, that he will bring evil? He has brought it already; we have quarrelled twice to-day — the first time!”

“It shall be the first and the last, Leone, dearest,” she said sweetly, “only it provokes me to see you superstitious and to have you entirely spoil the child, and I suppose I was cross and sleepy; I waited up a long time for you.”

“I did not expect to be gone so long,” he said. “Meurice and I were talking, and the subject of the vaults came up, and — well, there was nothing particular to do —”

“That’s just it,” she said, “there never is anything to do here. One day is exactly the same as the other. I long to meet strangers and see people, don’t you? — and get new ideas, or hear some good music, or go to a dance. Oh, what would it be like to have a lovely new gown and go to a dance!”

“I would not like to see thee at a dance, Margherita; thou wouldst have too many partners and they would take thee from me.”

"But you would have partners, too, and you would love it," she declared. "Only think of all those great saloons downstairs, empty, empty all the time. What a ball we might give if there were only some people to invite!"

"I do not long for other people," he said soberly; "I have all I want with thee and the little one and Meurice. Art thou tired of us, Margherita?"

"Ah, no, no!" she cried, and she threw her arms around his neck.

The Belmontes were not the only ones who sat up late that night, as Clemente knew when he made his rounds the next morning to fill the lamps and replenish the candles. There was some excuse for them, with a teething *bambino*, and for the *padrone* of course, if he chose. But what right had that red-haired minx, Santoni's Carlotta, to burn oil as if she were a grand lady, wasting household supplies and giving him extra trouble?

When Margaret had gone upstairs early the evening before Carlotta had pretended to be so engrossed in her novel that she did not notice her leaving. She had remained in the hope of having a little talk with the young Signore or that the *Professore Artista* would ask her to sing. But when Fauvel had come indoors after his smoke, accompanied by Signor Leone, he had gone directly upstairs while the latter rang for Beppo and gave him some order she could not hear, and presently Fauvel had come down and they had both gone out again. She had followed them as far as the courtyard, and had seen them each take a lantern from the waiting stable boy, but she could go no farther for fear of being detected in the bright moonlight, and of turning her ankle on the rough flagstones, in her thin, high-heeled slippers.

How did she ever exist, she wondered, before she had seen and known Leone Belmonte and experienced this novelty of being received in his home almost as an equal? So gorgeously *handsome* he was, so graceful, so unusual, but oh, so absurdly

wrapped up in that fat baby and so hopelessly in love with that small, plain-looking Signora, his wife, “Little, ordinary, dark-haired thing,” she said to herself, “what can he possibly see in her?”

But even as she used the adjective she knew that “ordinary” did not apply. She felt that the “*Americana*” was an extraordinary young woman, though she could not tell wherein her attraction lay. How did she manage to hold her handsome husband even after she had borne him a son, so that he gave her the strictest and most unquestionable fidelity? He had never had an affair with any of the village beauties, had not even been seen to as much as throw a kiss to any of them, and not one of them could say that he had ever cast an admiring glance in her direction. Yes, the Signora possessed some unusual attraction which was felt rather than seen, and Carlotta had sat up, burning the candles, pondering how she could compete with her.

She had fallen in love with Belmonte, and the question was, why did he not return it?

She was used to admiration and attention. The average man was attracted at a glance, and Belmonte was the very one who should go mad over her golden hair, her blue eyes, and her fair pink skin, since he was so entirely her opposite. She, an acknowledged beauty, who had been chosen by a celebrated artist to be a foil to his own good looks! But Belmonte took no notice of her except to be polite, and his indifference had increased her desire for conquest. How could she win him? Her beauty was ignored, and apparently she could not charm him with her voice. What was it, what was it? she kept asking herself, as the candles burned low, and from down the corridor came the plaintive crying of the *bambino* Belmonte.

The American had no beauty and no voice and yet she attracted these two men, one so handsome and the other so critical. She did not have to tax her brain to make conversation;

what she said came naturally, as she sat still with her pretty little hands folded and did nothing.

It was very hard for Carlotta to compose herself; she was most ill at ease in a drawing-room, was constantly opening or shutting a fan, handling some object or moving about restlessly, and one of the chief things she envied in Margaret was her repose of manner and self-possession.

This marriage between the *Americana* and Belmonte was certainly a remarkable one. They were so young and yet contented alone together on a mountain top, without missing the society of the gay world for which they were both fitted.

Margaret had no idea of Carlotta's enmity toward her; she found her companionable, for she sorely missed the society of her own sex and made more of a friend of Santoni's daughter than she ever would have dreamed of doing had there been any woman of her own class available. She was interested in the girl's career as a singer and liked to help her plan her costumes; besides, Carlotta made a great display of affection for the baby and was loud in her praises of his beauty, and that appealed to Margaret's maternal pride.

He was a wonderfully bright child, and though he did not talk he managed to make himself understood. So far his only word was his father's name, abbreviated into "'Oné," which he would repeat continually and sometimes he would attempt to call "Fleurette," the macaw, and many a frolic he would have trying to catch Fauvel's pet, which with clipped wings, could only fly a few feet. The baby would raise his arms and try his best to fly, too, and then clap his little hands and scream with glee as Fleurette came fluttering back to the ground, shedding some of her brilliant plumage in the excitement of the chase.

And as the child grew in beauty and intelligence his father's love for him grew stronger and stronger, until it became little short of adoration. If anything went wrong, the child's first cry was for "'Oné," "'Oné," and the doting parent would drop

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everything and hasten to settle matters to the satisfaction of the little one. If the child did not want to be taken upstairs at the proper hour for his nap he had only to appeal to “Oné” and he need not go.

This troubled Margaret, for she had seen children brought up at home with regular habits and she also realized that where a spoiled infant may be tolerated a spoiled boy is intolerable.

“Do not worry over such trifles, *sposina mia*,” Leone would say; “one hour for a nap is as good as another,” and then he would carry the child off to the garden, lay him down in the shade of an oleander tree and shake the limbs until its loose blossoms fell over him like a snowstorm and the little one became exhausted with the sport and fell asleep. His father would mount guard over him, with a palm branch keeping away the insects, and silently worshipping his offspring. When Margaret would find her child napping peacefully under a coverlid of pink and white petals, Leone would pull her down beside him and kiss away her annoyance and say: “See, *A more*, this is nature’s cradle, the soft dry grass, the sky and air; such sleep is good and I am close beside him.”

But once she replied, still vexed: “The way you behave with the baby is idolatry, nothing more nor less.”

A dark flush mounted to his face as if her words had angered him; then controlling himself he answered gently: “You do not love him as I do, Margherita; you never have. I know Fauvel chaffs me and says I am the mother, not you. You did not want the little one to come and I did. You thought it a disgrace, and I know what is always in your mind; though you love him in a way, you look upon him as your shame, but he is my glory, my delight! You are always afraid some of your people will find out he is yours; on the contrary, I would rejoice if the whole world might know he was mine, another *Estori*!” And he looked proudly at the sleeping child. The sweet little mouth was parted with the suggestion of a smile,

showing two tiny teeth, and the long lashes swept the soft rosy cheeks.

"Another Estori," he repeated; "they have always been a handsome race, my mother was beautiful, and my son," he added, "is more beautiful than all. Ah, little heart," he murmured, as he bent over him waving the palm to and fro, to ward off a butterfly that was hovering near, "*angelino!*"

About the middle of August Fauvel decided to join friends at Ostend; he would only be gone three weeks, he said, for he must be back to complete his picture of "Springtime" before he took up his winter quarters in Perugia. He made his farewells to the family the previous evening, as he intended to leave at sunrise, but Leone, who never let Fauvel depart without seeing him off, rose early and, taking up the child, who always awoke with the dawn, went over to his apartments to have a few last words with him.

He found the artist hastily taking his coffee and rolls.

"I wish things were so that I might take you and Margherita with me," he said. "I think she needs a change; she has a stupid time of it here, poor little Margherita!"

Leone looked at him in astonishment. "What do you mean, Meurice?" he said.

"I mean that Margherita is a woman who by her birth, education, and natural charm could shine in the world, and yet she loves you enough to put it all aside and stay with you in a ruin, living here in obscurity, like a choice flower that grows sometimes, who knows why, in the rift of a lonely rock. Few men are loved like this; I never was; I wonder if you appreciate it?"

"Of course I do," he replied, a little ruffled, "but I cannot see why you are sorry for her. She has the best of health, a life free from care, her husband and her child—" glancing down with pride at the little laughing face looking up at him.

"Ah, her child!" Fauvel repeated. "You never let her have her child. You have one great monopoly there. Day

and night you take her baby away from her. You are selfish to her in this matter, enormously selfish."

"I would not be selfish with Margherita for all the world," he said resentfully, "but I love the child more than she does, and often he is troublesome to her, but he is never a trouble to me."

"Women expect their children to be a trouble to them as well as a pleasure. I have never heard her complain."

"Oh, no, not that —"

"Well, you should let her have more care of him. If she happens to be playing with him alone and you come along, you monopolize the baby and the toy and Margherita has to do something else. Yesterday when you took him out of her arms and went off with him, I found her throwing your ball listlessly against the side of the house and catching it again without any interest in the act. It was a pathetic sight to me. I tell you she needs her little one and you ought to let her have him!"

At first Leone made no answer; then after a slight pause, lifting the child in his arms, he said, "Don't you think it is as much a father's duty to care for a child as a mother's?"

"Certainly, but I do not see that you are caring for him. It is a father's duty to work for his children, not to idle away the days amusing and spoiling them. You have not touched your manuscripts lately. You are wasting valuable time."

"You are right about that," he assented. "I must get to work again. Oh, you may find fault with me and criticize me. I don't doubt you are right, Meurice, but you cannot comprehend how I love my son, and he loves me just as much. Ah, we understand each other, little heart?" and a soft, tender light came into his eyes. "Why, Meurice, I love this child so much — so much — I can hardly explain it; but I feel as if there were some cord of sympathy between him and me that could not be broken if one of us should die."

"That is a woman's love," said Fauvel disapprovingly, "it

is not a man's love. You must fight against this, Estori, for it is unnatural, and you are mistaken when you hint that Margherita does not love her child; she does, but she is a normal parent; you are not. Now," he continued, as he put down his cup and rose from the table, "if you will help me with this shawl-strap a moment —"

Leone stood the child on the floor and gave a vigorous pull. "Thank you, that's it. Ah, ah, naughty!" Fauvel said to the baby, as he caught the little hand stealing sugar from the breakfast tray; and, turning to Leone, "Do not let him do that; he has helped himself to three pieces and you say nothing. Margherita would not allow that, she loves her child too well to let him ruin his teeth and his digestion. *Avanti!*" he called out in answer to a knock at the door, and Illario, the driver, and Beppo entered. "All this goes," he said, pointing to a pile of luggage which they proceeded to carry out. "Yes, I'm ready."

"Kiss thy hand to the uncle," Leone said to the child as Fauvel was about to get into the carriage.

Fauvel was not demonstrative and he could not tell at the time what made him turn back and take the child from its father and kiss it again and again.

This strange, self-contained man loved the tiny being who had found its way into his ruinous retreat, he could not tell why, for he loved few things outside his art; first of all, perhaps, because it was beautiful. Secondly, its parents had endeared themselves to him, he supposed partly on account of their dependence. Until he had taken Margaret and Estori under his protection he had gone through life without realizing what it was to have others dependent on him and he took a peculiar pleasure in all he did for them. Also he felt in a way responsible for the little one's coming into the world, and thirdly, he loved it for its own sake; it had a sweet and remarkable personality for a child of such tender age. Leone had taken it from the cradle, and in a frolic it had cast aside its *night-slip* and was clothed only in a short, sleeveless garment.

Fauvel kissed the laughing mouth, the white dimpled arms and shoulders that Margherita had given it, then handed him back to Leone, who perched him on his left shoulder, throwing his arms lightly about him, taking one of those easy, graceful poses that were so natural to him. He had dressed hastily and wore a loose pink shirt (a color most becoming to his clear olive skin) open at the neck, with the sleeves rolled up, showing his fine, full throat and chest and strong young arms. He wore short tan trousers, and was without shoes or stockings. Fauvel thought that he had never seen him look so handsome or so youthful, as he stood there beaming with happy pride at the attention bestowed upon his son.

His was a light-hearted, happy temperament, living merely for the present, enjoying the beautiful, taking the sweets of life and avoiding the bitter. Eloquent, ardent, lofty in sentiment and pure in mind, with the high-born bearing of the noble house of Estori and the startling, audacious beauty of his Sicilian mother, a beauty that still shows strains of Greek, Saracen, Arabic and Egyptian blood blended into the Latin.

The two seemed as if they might have been kissed by the dawn, so fresh they were, with the early sunshine falling upon them, heightening the rich crimson in Leone's face and giving to the perfect little body in his arms a wonderful rosy glow.

What a picture they made! And Fauvel was forcibly struck with a new idea.

The world had prated of "Motherhood" since time immemorial, poets had sung of it, and since the Christian era had made a religion of it; but who spoke of "Fatherhood"? Whoever saw it as he saw it there? He would like to show it to the world just as he saw it, to put it in a new light, to make it an inspiration to weary toiling fathers who sometimes look upon their children as burdens only; to indifferent fathers to instill love and to every father to teach a lesson of pride in his offspring; and Fauvel found himself admiring in Leone the very characteristics for which a few moments before he had

admonished him. There was something most touching and yet terrible in the strength of the love of this young father. It was the fierceness of the eagle with the tenderness of the dove. His whole being radiated the pride of his fatherhood; it seemed to say, "This lovely babe is bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh, through me he has his being; he is mine, another self, and I adore him, I worship him, my son — my son!"

"Wave farewell to the uncle, *Amore*," Leone said again; "he goes far away from us to the seashore of another country; when he returns perhaps thou wilt have learned another word. Good-by, Meurice; *à riverderci*."

As the wagon rolled through the courtyard, they still stood there waving to him, and the last time Fauvel turned back to look at them a great golden butterfly was hovering just out of reach of the little arm and hand stretched up to catch it; in his mind's eye he saw that picture many times afterwards.

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE SPELL WORKS

Yet Love is weak,  
It cannot stand alone amid the strife,  
It cannot teach our faltering lips to speak,  
It cannot even save one little life!  
Love is so weak!

CONSTANCE JOHNSON.

Fauvel's vacation had expired and he was expected home at any time. The season was advancing, and the harvest moon rose nightly, big as a cart-wheel and yellow as gold.

Leone, Margaret and Carlotta were together in the grand central hall of the keep, where a lordly colonnade supported the lofty ceiling and gigantic caryatids graced the walls. At one end of the hall was a thronelike stone seat, raised a few steps above the floor. In this Leone lounged carelessly, strumming a guitar and watching Margaret and Carlotta amuse themselves with a basket of kittens. They had no lamp, for the moonlight coming in through the long windows flooded the place, casting upon the marble floor the shadow of their iron bars.

Margaret had invited Carlotta to remain during Fauvel's absence and she had readily accepted.

"How glad I shall be to have Meurice at home again!" Margaret was saying. "It is always so dull without him."

Carlotta looked at her; the remark had been made most innocently, but the girl stored it up in her memory for future use. "Meurice knows so much," Margaret went on; "history, art, geography, archæology, languages —"

"To say nothing of medicine and surgery," put in Leone; "don't forget that."

"I'm not likely to," she said. "Do you think I will ever

forget how splendid he was when the baby was born? But I was thinking what a source of knowledge he is. If I want to know about something, I have only to ask him and he explains so clearly and lucidly. Oh, yes, I always miss him when he is away."

"So do I," said Leone, "and I'll be immensely glad to have him back except that his return means those tiresome hours in the studio again."

Carlotta's blue eyes flashed. She shared those hours. "I shall be glad to have the *professore* return because he is always so polite," she said pointedly.

Margaret gave Leone a reproving glance; his speech had sounded personal though he had not intended it so. He shrugged his shoulders in answer to her look, played a few chords on the guitar, and began to sing a popular song. Carlotta, conquering her momentary anger, joined in with her strong mezzo-soprano, while Margaret took up the refrain —

"*'E la rosa piu bella che c'è.'*"

The accompaniment had a gay waltz movement, and their voices rose to the domed ceiling, filling the spacious hall with merry music.

Suddenly Lisa, Armida and Beppo burst excitedly upon them, all speaking at once. Leone stood up, telling them to be silent, and giving permission to Beppo alone to explain.

The boy came forward, his eyes dilating.

"A horrible creature, Signore — hideous, all head and arms, *brutto, bruttissimo*, more like an animal, than a human, an evil one, for sure! It might be well to close all doors and windows on the ground floor —"

"The *jettatura*, the dwarf!" Leone exclaimed, his fingers making the signs of the horns. "Where did you see him?"

"Near the kitchen door," the boy replied. "Armida stepped out to draw some water from the cistern; we heard her scream, and both Lisa and I saw him. Shall the Signore have the windows closed? — the bars are broken and rotten."

"Let us look for him first," he said, and left the hall, followed by the terrified servants.

"Ah, *misericordia!*" wailed Carlotta, and Margaret saw that she also had fixed her left hand in the sign. "It is the 'evil eye' again; misfortune threatens us!"

Margaret's lip curled a little scornfully. "The poor thing," she said, "was probably hungry and only going to beg for something to eat."

"Signora," said Carlotta sharply, "you are not *simpatica*;\* your husband suffers and you laugh. I suffer, but wait — time will show if our fears are foolish," and she began to fan herself violently. Here at least she had something in common with Belmonte.

Leone and Beppo made a tour around the outside of the castle and grounds, but could find no one. Just as they were about to give up, however, they saw for an instant, far off upon a hillock, the grotesque figure of Ferruccio, the dwarf, silhouetted against the pale sky. They ran in that direction but their search was fruitless as before; in spite of his age, the creature was quick and agile and had slipped away somewhere. Leone was greatly disturbed. He wished that Fauvel were home to consult. The secret of the hidden passage was not a pleasant thought, and doubly unpleasant from his conviction that the fellow foreboded evil.

Upon reëntering the house he gave orders to close all the doors and windows on the ground floor, and not to open them on any pretext until morning.

"I'm so glad Fauvel will soon be back," Margaret said; "I'm quite sure he will not consent to our being shut up without any air."

"But the servants, *mia cara*, are very nervous," Leone replied; "they are always fearful and superstitious about the 'evil eye'."

"The servants are also superstitious about an *unbaptized*

\* Sympathetic.

*child*," she returned; "but you don't seem to let that disturb you." He shuffled uncomfortably in his chair, but made no answer, and the evening being broken up, they retired.

"This is from Meurice," said Leone the next day, as he tore open a letter with a French stamp. "Good! he expects to be with us to-night! And this is for thee," and he handed Margaret a pamphlet.

She opened it. It was a fashion magazine with pictures of prominent women in smart, modish gowns.

"Oh, dear, oh, dear!" she sighed, as she turned its pages. "This shows me how frightfully out of date my clothes are, but what can one expect when one lives up in the clouds, and the only styles one sees in the villages are the green umbrellas of the peasants! What a sight I must look like, and I used to keep up to the times in everything, and although I was never extravagant no one could say that I was not always well dressed, but now — oh, dear!"

"You always look beautiful to me, Margherita," Leone said consolingly; "I think your dresses are lovely."

"That is because you know nothing of the styles, and there are no well-dressed women for you to see."

"Fauvel sees well-dressed women in Rome and Perugia and other cities, and he always thinks you look all right."

"Because Fauvel is an artist and has a mind above prevailing styles. If I stick a bow or feather on a hat at a becoming angle he says it is 'artistic' and that's all he cares about. But if I should go into the cities other men would laugh at my old-fashioned things and the women would snub me and call me a 'shabby dud.'"

"Men and women who would be cruel to thee on account of thy clothes are not worth considering, *carissima*."

"Oh, that's the way of the world, you don't understand; clothes are such a factor." Margaret and Leone were alone, with the baby playing beside them.

"I'm thinking there is much wisdom in the cloister, where

monastic orders have not changed their styles for over a thousand years. What would be accomplished if Padre Carlo should make himself sick with envy of the cut of Fra Anselmo's cape, or the sacristan insult the porter on account of the shape of his collar!" And Leone laughed softly to himself at the mere idea.

It was rarely he alluded to his old life, but Margaret was poring over the fashions and paid no attention, and the baby, who was tired of his playthings, began to tug at the paper in her hand.

"No, darling," she said, "you cannot have it; this is mother's book; here is baby's," and she picked up an indestructible one full of colored pictures and opened it; "see the big doggie and the white pussy-cat; nice book for baby."

But the little one was tired of his own and wanted hers. He tugged at it again and tore one of the leaves.

"Oh, naughty, naughty!" she cried, and before she could catch the little ruthless hand another leaf was gone.

"Can you not take care of him this afternoon, Leone?" she asked. "Giacinta is lying down; she has a headache, and I must write home."

The child was just at that troublesome age when he was into everything quick as a flash and needed watching every moment. Leone put down Fauvel's letter. "I too have writing planned for this afternoon, Margherita. You know there is nothing I would rather do than amuse the *bambino*, but I must get that manuscript copied and sent off before Meurice returns; if I don't, he will say that I am wasting time."

"It is nearly a month since I've written to my sister, and I must do it to-day. You have had plenty of time all this while."

"I might say the same thing: you have had plenty of time."

"Perhaps; but I am busy about other matters. Oh, don't let him be so destructive!" she cried, as the little one ran over to Leone with the magazine, bent on destroying it.

"Come, *Amore*, sweet," Leone said, rescuing the book and tossing it to her, "I am busy also, Margherita, but I am never too busy to take care of my son. Do you notice how we always come near quarreling every time the 'evil eye' appears? Come, *Amore*," he said again, as he took the child in his arms, "we will find a book that thou may'st tear to thy heart's content."

And Margaret heard him muttering as he walked away in injured dignity: "Never mind, little one, thy father loves thee; thy father would die for thee!"

Margaret went up to her room and wrote her letter and then dressed with a shade of conscience that she had been selfish. She glanced in the long mirror and said to herself: "Yes, I'm terribly out of date. My gown is clean and fresh, that's the only thing to its credit; but it's awfully 'school-girl-looking'; not a bit appropriate for a woman who's supposed to be married, and not at all what's being worn. Oh, well, Leone loves me and the baby loves me, and they don't know anything about styles, and Meurice and Carlotta think I'm all right, and they are my world, after all," so she ran downstairs and out into the garden. Carlotta sat reading in the shade.

"Don't you want to help me find some flowers?" she said to her. "I would like the rooms to look pretty when Signor Fauvel comes."

Carlotta laid down her book and the two girls gathered what flowers the fierce August sun had spared. They took them into the house and Margaret rang for Armida. "Bring me a jug of water and pour some into the crystal bowl in the cedar room." Then to Carlotta, "We will arrange the flowers on the big table in there."

When Armida returned with the water she informed them that an automobile was coming along the road that led up from the valley and would pass the castle, and did not the ladies wish to see it? They ran out to the great gates of the courtyard and waited; any event out of the ordinary was a welcome di-

version, and so far automobiles had not ventured the precipitous approach to the castle.

"*Dio mio*," said Carlotta, "when automobiles can climb mountains and air-ships rise up and look in at our windows, there will not be a spot where one can be in seclusion if one chooses."

The machine, a high-powered climber, slowed down almost to a stop as it passed; its occupants, two men, were evidently admiring the beauty of the old fortress and discussing its points of interest; then they started again, throwing on the brakes for the descent, and went whizzing away; but as Margaret and Carlotta turned to go back to the house, a frightful blood-curdling shriek was heard, then a pistol shot, and a second and a third.

"Something terrible has happened," said Margaret; "can there have been an accident?"

"No," said Carlotta, "for there goes the machine."

The automobile, lost to sight for a few seconds between the high walls that turned at the foot of the hill, was now speeding along the serpentine road toward the village as if Satan himself was after it. "That scream and shot were close at hand," said Margaret; "let us go and see —"

Carlotta held her back. "If there is trouble, Signora, we women ought to keep out of it." But Margaret's face had changed in that instant. "My husband," she said, "and my baby, where are they? I have not seen them around anywhere! The signore often carries a pistol when he goes outside the gates — oh, dear God!"

She grasped Carlotta's arm and then darted down the road, for Leone had appeared stumbling and staggering, with the child limp in his arms.

"Where are you hurt, Leone, dearest?" she cried, as she bounded toward him, Carlotta following.

Leone was covered with blood, his face was livid, but his eyes blazed. His teeth were chattering so that he could not

form his speech; but at last he managed to gasp: "Not I—not I—but the little one—the automobile made no sound—I neither saw nor heard it—the *bambino* ran out—ah, *Madre di Dio*, I fired the shots—I! I hope to God I killed them—they ran over the little innocent with no more feeling than if he had been a squirrel and never stopped to see or help me. I hope they choke now in death agony, with fumes of hell! Curse them! Ah, my son, my son!"

All the color had vanished from Margaret's face. Carlotta thought she was going to die on the spot. She shut her eyes for a second and swayed as if about to fall, then she braced herself, gathering all her nerve-force to look again upon the shocking sight she had just perceived, the blood pouring from the baby's crushed feet.

She stood very still, trying to take it all in. Leone was unhurt, but her child was probably mortally injured, or else maimed for life. His eyes were closed and he was unconscious.

"Precious lamb!" she murmured; then making a supreme effort, took him from Leone; he moaned and the blood flowed down upon her white dress. "Precious lamb!" she breathed again, and began to carry him to the house.

But Leone's strength had given way, his legs bent under him, he could not stand, and Carlotta put her arm around him and supported him as they followed Margaret up the road, through the gateway, across the flagged courtyard and into the house, leaving a trail of blood in their wake. Lisa and Armida had also heard and ran out, wringing their hands and calling frantically upon all the saints for aid. Clemente was in the village and Beppo visiting his mother on the other side of the mountain. Only the women were at home. They tried to stop Margaret with their lamentations and questions, but she pushed past them and made her way to the cedar room and laid the child down. "Fly to Fauvel's closet," she commanded Carlotta, "and find the bottle with a blue label; it is an antisep-

tic, and call Giacinta. Something must be done to stop this bleeding. Lisa, bring a sheet and tear it in strips, and you, Armida, come here with that bowl of water."

"Is she made of iron," thought Carlotta, as she flew off on the errand; "at least, she has a heart of it — she sheds not a tear and her only child lies mangled."

Leone leaned against the wall, useless and shaking. He had lost the power of speech again and was chattering and muttering, his arm raised in a threatening attitude as if cursing the whole world.

And Margaret, dry-eyed and silent, did what she could, feeling her helplessness and ignorance, as she bathed the ghastly remains of her child's limbs, while Armida, sobbing, held the bowl of water.

Then Lisa returned with the sheet, tearing it on her way, and Carlotta brought the bottle, and — oh, thank Heaven! — Giacinta came.

She said not a word but went straight to the couch and took the bandages from Margaret's trembling hands and quickly tied them above each ankle, using all her strength to pull them tight until the veins stood out upon her forehead, then deftly made a tourniquet.

Margaret looked at her appealingly.

"The arteries, Signora, I fear are severed." Then to the others, waving them back, "Don't crowd around; you keep the air from the little one." They obeyed and moved away.

Every one respected Giacinta; she had a quiet dignity and knew a great deal about sickness and nursing. "Without a doctor we can do nothing more at present," she continued, "and amputation may be necessary to save his life."

At the word "amputation" Leone found his speech; he flung himself on his knees beside the couch and cried out:

"No, no, never! Thy little feet cut off — no, no, *Amore*, thou wilt soon be well again, as soon as Meurice comes to thee. We were down the hill waiting for him; he may be here any

minute. Thou shalt run and play again, *angelino*, thou shalt, thy father promises it to thee. We will have the best surgeon in the kingdom!"

The child grew suddenly whiter. Giacinta felt the tiny pulse and shook her head.

"Oh, Meurice," gasped Margaret, "why are you not here!"

"We can send to Fossato for a doctor—" Leone wailed.

"It would be hours before a doctor could reach us," Giacinta replied; then added gently, "Signore mio, do not deceive yourself. The *bambino* grows weaker, and we are powerless."

"Dear Leone," said Margaret, shuddering, "he would be a helpless cripple."

"Oh, *horrendo!*" \* cried Carlotta, "let him die at once sooner than that." But Leone turned on them fiercely. "You women are all fools!" he cried. "You don't know what surgery can do in these days; it is marvelous, and the *bambino* is so strong that everything is in his favor. Put on more bandages, Giacinta, and pull them tighter. Oh, Meurice, Meurice, make haste! I will ride Fiora down the road to meet him and he can hurry back on the horse. Do you, Armida," he added, turning to the girl, "run to the top of the tower and see if the *padrone* is coming. *Amore, Amore,*" he wailed again, as he made an inclosure of his arms around the still child, "thou wilt soon be better, yes, yes—open thine eyes and look at thy father."

"Signore," said Giacinta again, with her hand once more on the baby's pulse, "do not rave; he dies, the little one; it is the will of God."

"There is no God," he shrieked wildly; "no heaven, no hell; there is only my son, and he shall not die! See, he revives!"

The baby stirred slightly, his eyelids moved, and the drawn, pained look around his mouth disappeared as he gave two or three little gasps. "He wants water, water; give me water!"

\* Oh, horror!

Carlotta poured some into a tumbler and handed it to him. Leone put the glass to the baby's lips but he only made bubbles in it but could not swallow, and a yellow pallor began to creep over his brow.

Margaret was seated at the foot of the couch watching every change. "Dear Leone," she said, "do you not see?"

But he answered roughly, "Thou hast no sense; I tell thee, Margherita, my child shall be saved. If I can only make him take it, water will revive him," and he tried again to make the baby drink.

"The water of baptism," said Giacinta; "that saves."

"Baptize your child," said Margaret, "quick — quick!" Her voice rang through the room; it was a command, and Leone, like a drowning man who will snatch at a straw and who calls upon Heaven when all earthly help fails, stood up, pressing one hand to his heart to keep it from bursting and with the other raised the glass. He looked helplessly around for a second, as if trying to collect his scattered senses. "*Amore*," he almost whispered, as he poured the water three times over the child's head, the while repeating the Latin words, "*Ego te baptizo in nomine Patris — et Filii — et Spiritus Sancti.*"

"*Amen*," said the four women.

Carlotta received the glass from his trembling hand, while he bent over, pushing the wet ringlets from the little one's brow, and instinctively made upon his forehead the sign of the cross. Then he leaned heavily against the wall for support, calmed and awed for the moment by his own solemn action.

All were silent. Only the ticking of the clock could be heard. Outside the sun was setting and the great room was becoming shadowy. Breathlessly they were watching the soul new-born into spiritual life, who would answer in Heaven to the name of "Love," and as they watched, the yellow pallor, the sign of Death, spread more and more over the exquisite little face, and all but Leone felt the Awful Presence in their midst. He had

fallen upon his knees again and was entreating the child to look at him. And it seemed as if the baby understood, for he opened his eyes and with a weak movement the little arms went out toward his father. "*Amore*," Leone whispered, "*Amore mio*," and his look of anguish changed to one of hope. "See," he whispered, "he revives, he knows me," as the half-closed lids opened wider and full consciousness returned; "see, he revives, he lives—" but, ah! a faint tremor went through the small frame, the sweet mouth parted in a smile, and the now wide-open eyes were looking straight into his.

"See," Leone whispered again, "he knows me—he smiles at me—he—"

"He is dead," said Margaret.

"No, no, no!" he cried. "Stand out of the light, Carlotta—"

The momentary gleam of consciousness was gone and the eyes met his gaze in a glassy stare. He shrank back from the couch with a piercing cry; he beat his head against the wall and tore his hair. Carlotta and Lisa retreated in terror. Giacinta began to compose the baby's limbs and rumpled clothing, and to close his eyes, while Leone continued to rave; then he rushed from the room cursing the murderers and vowing vengeance.

"He is mad," said Giacinta, looking after him. "Do not mind him, Signora; he will be himself as soon as the first shock is over."

But Margaret paid no attention. She had sunk into a chair, her hands pressed tightly on top of her head as if to keep her brain from giving way. She neither wept nor spoke. The wild abandonment of Leone's grief had silenced her own, and it was all so sudden. She sat like one turned to stone, not yet realizing the tragedy. She looked round the room; there were the flowers, drooping now, that she had gathered to welcome Fauvel, and there was the crystal bowl that she had ordered filled with water, and it had served to wash the mortal wounds of her child. Carlotta tiptoed over to her and placed her hand

on her shoulder. "*Cara Signora*," she said, "my heart breaks for you and the Signore." But Margaret paid no heed, but watched the sand run through the hour-glass that she had turned when she first came down; it was but half empty; only thirty minutes ago and all had been well.

Fleurette the macaw, that happened to be in the room on her gilt stand, had been very quiet during the excitement, but now she began to chatter, and Margaret wondered dumbly why this gaudy, soulless creature should be allowed to live, when life had been taken from her joyous, lovely baby boy.

The bird's noise irritated her, and she rose. "I am going to my room," she said; "I am very tired, I want to lie down."

Giacinta came and put her arm about her, and led her up the stairs. It is customary in Italy for the family to retire and leave the body for a short time, almost as soon as life has expired.

They had all gone but Carlotta. She glanced at the little corpse. "'Tis the *jettatura*," she murmured; "his spell works. I told *la Margherita* evil would happen, and she laughed. But thank Heaven, Belmonte is spared!" Then crossing herself, she too left, not wishing to stay alone with Death.

Margaret's calm was unnatural, and Giacinta was worried. She helped her into a dressing gown, loosened her long thick hair, brushed and braided it, and Margaret lay on the lounge with her head resting in Giacinta's lap, while the latter bathed her hot temples. She would take nothing to eat or drink, nor would she have a light. She lay there silent in her paralyzed grief, watching the stars make pin-points in her windows. Then there was a step in Leone's room and a beam of light through the half-open door; a knock, and Fauvel appeared with a candle. She started up and tottered toward him. "You know, Fauvel," she asked; "you know —" He answered very gently, "I know, my child; I know —" and before he could put out his arm to save her, she had fallen at his feet.

## CHAPTER XX

### THE TOMB ON THE MOUNTAIN

"Oh, the price was high that those shoes would buy,  
Those little blue unused shoes!"

When Margaret opened her eyes dawn was breaking. Fauvel was standing by her bedside. She awoke dazed. Once before in the cold gray morning light Fauvel had stood there. "Is the child born," she asked faintly; "is it all right?"

For a moment there was no reply; then he said, "Go to sleep again, Margherita; you need rest, you have been ill all night." But she sat up, exclaiming: "Oh, no, let me get up! How thankful I am to be awake! I have had the most horrible dream, the most frightful, cruel dream!—so real, so awful! It was all about the baby—"

The moment had arrived that he had been dreading. "Margherita," he said, "when the little one was born you were very brave; can you be brave now?"

She gave him one quick, searching look. "O-oh," she gasped, as if in physical pain, "it is true, all true! Oh, my baby, my baby!"

Never in his life had Fauvel felt so helpless. Words failed him. What could he say to comfort her?—there was nothing. Knowing her constitution and mentality as he did, he thought it best that the awakening to the truth should be immediate.

"Where is he," she moaned, "my baby?—I want to see him!"

"In there," Fauvel replied, pointing to the next room.

"Signora, *cara mia*," said Giacinta, "had you not better wait?"

"No, no," she said; "give me my wrapper, please, I must see

## *The Tomb on the Mountain* 231

him." Then to Fauvel: "I will not cry, I promise you I will not cry."

"You may cry now as much as you like, *ma chère*; it will do you good."

At the door between the rooms, which was closed, she hesitated. "Is there much blood?" she asked, shuddering.

"There is no blood," he answered, and as they crossed the threshold she grasped his hand. "I have never seen death but once," she faltered; "that was when my father died. I was very young, but he died naturally."

The gray dawn was coming into the room, Leone's bed had not been slept in, but beside it stood the old cradle, and in it, fair and sweet and peaceful, lay the little one. All the cruel blood-stains had been washed away and he lay between snowy sheets, dressed in a fresh night slip, but very pale and in such deep, deep sleep.

"Precious lamb," she whispered, "oh, precious lamb!" She still held Fauvel's hand in her icy one. "It was at dawn that I first saw him, do you remember? But what a draught you have him in," she continued reproachfully. All the windows were open, the curtains blowing out and the room was very chilly. "I should like to hold him, may I?" She asked the question timidly and nervously, feeling more than understanding the separation of death of which she knew so little.

"You may hold him for a very few minutes," Fauvel answered.

She took him up very tenderly. "How heavy he has grown," she said, and passing the foot of the bed, she reached for a small infant's blanket that was lying there, for baby was very cold. Then she sat down with him. She lifted the little slip; however terrible the sight, she must look, but the clumsy blood-soaked bandages that she and Giacinta had put on were gone and the little limbs were neatly bound in clean swaddling-bands, just as they used to be in his early infancy. Then she put the blanket over him and held him close.

In every crisis of her life her mother and sister had been paramount in her mind. She thought of them now. There was a look in that still little face that reminded her of Josephine. She had always vaguely hoped that the time might come when she would be able to acknowledge her child and show them this lovely Italian flower, that had their blood in his veins. But now that would never be.

"Where would you like him buried?" Fauvel asked. "It is a hard question, I know, but one that must be settled at once."

"In the garden, I think. He loved to play there with the birds and butterflies. Where is Leone?" she asked suddenly. "He went mad when this happened. Poor Leone!"

"Yes, I know," said Fauvel. "He is asleep now, over in my apartments. I gave him something that will keep him asleep for several hours yet. When he awakes he will be calmer."

"Fauvel," she said, looking down at the child again, "Leone was sure you could have saved him if you had been here?"

"Leone was mistaken, *ma chère*; when I examined the wounds I knew that nothing could have been done. He had lost too much blood between the foot of the hill and the long distance up to the house. But he did not suffer; let that comfort you. He died of weakness, and it came so suddenly he did not even have time to be frightened; he knew no fear. Your baby has never known anything but happiness, safety and love. Thrice happy child."

"*Amore, Amore*," she whispered. It was her child's rightful name now; Leone, in his frenzy of yesterday, when he had baptized him, could think of no other. It would be on no parish register, but the angels would record it in the Book of Life.

Then Fauvel said she must put the baby down, and she laid him back in the cradle, covering him with the blanket and shivering as she did so, for he was so cold that she was chilled; then she allowed herself to be led into her own room.

A thick mist enveloped the mountain all day, and Leone, finding the gloom of the castle unbearable, wandered outside. When he awakened from his long sleep he was quieter and more self-controlled, even when the pain of his loss rushed back to his heart, poignant as steel. He had worn himself out with the violence of his grief, and to-day he was exhausted, benumbed. So he walked listlessly about the grounds, unconscious that the mist had turned into a drizzling rain as he wandered from the ramparts to the garden, where he stumbled across Beppo and Illario the driver, with spades in their hands digging an oblong hole.

"What do you do there?" he asked abruptly.

"Alas, signore, we prepare the grave," answered Illario.

"Stop it at once," he said. His eyes were red and blood-shot and his features swollen from hours of weeping. "Stop it, I say!"

The men stopped and leaned over their spades. Illario looked at Beppo and Beppo at Illario. All the servants knew that the Signor Belmonte was a little bit "witched" on the subject of his child, and the two men had heard how he went "clean out of his mind" yesterday when the *bambino* breathed his last. Then Illario ventured: "It is by order of the *padrone*, signore."

"That is nothing to me," said Leone. "The child shall not lie there." Then he went into the house and sought Margaret.

"Is it thy wish, *carissima*, that the little one should be buried in the garden?" he asked.

"I thought it would be a comfort to have him near us always," she answered. "Fauvel says there are regular burial vaults in the crypt under the chapel, but I can't bear to put him down there in the damp and cold. I would rather he should lie in the sunshine, with the flowers."

"I too, Margherita; but not here. I should never go into the garden again; I should never willingly look out upon it from the windows; it would be a constant reminder of the

horror; I could not endure it. Leave it to me, I know of a spot, a long way from here, an enchanted, fairy place, so beautiful it is, where the birds sing and the sun shines and the flowers grow. He shall lie there. We will tell no one but Fauvel; we will rise early to-morrow morning and take him away by ourselves."

A little later Fauvel returned from the village, where he had been trying to find out something about the men who were responsible for the death of the child. He could not learn much. An automobile had come speeding through the village about half-past six on the afternoon of the previous day, having two occupants, strangers; one of these had been wounded in the right arm "by a stray shot," he said, "while passing over the mountain." They had stopped at the apothecary's, who had done what he could for him, but it was an ugly wound and needed the immediate attention of a surgeon to probe for the bullet, and they had driven off again, speeding to Fossato. Fauvel had sent a messenger reporting the accident to the Deputy Prefect there, asking that the men be apprehended. And yet he could not help thinking that if they were caught trouble must arise for Leone.

"When I made it possible for you to procure a license to carry fire-arms, I did not expect you to put your pistol in your pocket every day, as you would put on a collar," said Fauvel to him.

"I am not afraid of them," he returned. "I long to be brought face to face with them, and then I will finish what I have begun, and revenge my son. I only wish my bullet had been mortal."

"Signore," said Carlotta, "it is better as it is. Let us hope that the wretch may suffer forever with a wound that will not heal, or perhaps lose his arm; that would be fine revenge. If you had killed him outright he would not have suffered, but to have him maimed for life — oh, that is good!" then, turning to Margaret: "Do you not think so, signora?"

## *The Tomb on the Mountain* 235

"I cannot think about that part of it," Margaret said wearily; "whatever happens cannot give me back my baby."

The news of the tragedy had spread throughout the village and had even reached the peasants on the mountain. In the lonely spot that had scarcely changed in a thousand years each day was the same as yesterday, therefore any bit of gossip or an event that was out of the ordinary was carried from one dwelling to another, the inhabitants often leaving important work to walk a mile or so that they might have the delight of imparting the news to their neighbors. The beauty of the Bambino Belmonte had been much talked of by those who had seen him, and Fauvel was almost worshipped among them, for he was always ready to minister to them when their illnesses got beyond their own remedies. He had set broken limbs, dressed wounds, cured persistent ailments, often supplying the medicines himself, and sometimes sending nourishing food.

So in spite of the fog and the rain they climbed from their hovels to the castle, timidly making their way around the old fortress — some of them had never been up to it before — until they found the kitchen yard, there to express through the servants their grief and sympathy for the family of the "*Illustrissimo Professore Dottore*," for they believed the Belmontes to be relations of Fauvel, and to offer their services in hunting down the murderers of his nephew's son. "The *angelino*," they said, "the little innocent one," might they be allowed to say a prayer at the bier of the dead child? These requests became so numerous that the body was taken downstairs by Clemente and Giacinta, and laid out in the great central hall.

Margaret would have preferred keeping her baby near her for these last hours, but Fauvel was very indulgent with the peasants and Leone seemed pleased with the idea. Shortly afterward she went to a window in the corridor on a floor above that looked down into that vast room and saw her child lying in state as a noble prince. Tall candles burned at his head and feet, he was partially covered with a pale blue pall

which in its day had been very costly; now it was faded and worn, the gold thread of its embroidery tarnished with age. Clemente and Illario in their Sunday clothes were standing guard at a respectful distance as the humble visitors came and went, some bringing tawdry paper flowers which they laid beside the bier.

It all went against Margaret; but Leone, who had joined her, looked down with a sort of sad satisfaction as he whispered with a touch of pride, "It is as it should be; there is no honor too great for our son. It is fitting for an Estori." The irony of it struck her: the tiny corpse arrayed with so much ostentation, that had been born in shame, nurtured on the bounty of Fauvel and struck down like a worthless thing that encumbered the highway, and was now the object of curiosity to a few illiterate peasants, and yet this parody of homage pleased its father. There is something in the Italian that adores form and ceremony and ostentatious setting, and if poor Leone could find balm for his aching heart in what to her was only a pathetic farce she would say nothing to spoil the illusion.

Again just at dawn Margaret stood by her child. She and Leone had risen while it was yet dark and had come down to relieve Giacinta and old Santoni, who had been keeping the watch since midnight.

Margaret had dressed herself, as when going on long rambles with Leone, in a short woollen skirt and high boots. She had a wee pillow tucked under her arm. Leone lifted the child while Margaret folded the blue velvet pall tenderly around him; then they stole softly out, leaving the tall candles burning, and casting long fantastic shadows of their two figures on the high walls.

On they went through dark corridors, past silent rooms, down a winding stair and across the kitchen yard, until they came to a small door in the outer wall that opened directly on the mountain. The waning moon was dipping in the valley and in the East shone one pale star. Leone led the way, Margaret fol-

lowing. He plunged straight into the woods where there was a foot path.

Margaret had never before been out so early. A strange hush pervaded everything. It was very dark in the woods and the path was rough; she stumbled once or twice and Leone placed his burden on his left arm and took her hand. She noticed that he had his revolver in his pocket.

The walk seemed long to her, and neither of them had spoken since leaving the castle; they were now going downhill, quite away from Rocca Serrata; then he told her that the spot he had selected for the burial was on the other side of the mountain. As they proceeded a slight stir began in the foliage, an almost imperceptible flutter of that part of creation which always greets the dawn; there was a scamper of soft invisible feet and a rustling in the branches, and when at length they came out upon a fine smooth road a fox bounded ahead of them and a belated bat passed so near that its horrible wings brushed her cheek before it disappeared into the thicket.

Leone turned up the road, walking steadily on with his face set as one who has a hard task to perform and must not weaken, and Margaret followed him, until finally they came to a place where the road widened. On one side was a precipice, a drop of nearly a hundred feet, and on the other towering rocks which formed a sort of a semicircle around a lovely grassy dell. Above the rocks grew lofty pines and the air was sweet with the aromatic scent of resin. A stream of water, clear as crystal, ran down with a musical sound between the giant boulders and flowed into a reservoir of its own formation, making a natural fountain; opposite the stream, hollowed out of the living rock, was a small space so smooth and even that it seemed almost as if hewn by the hand of man. Margaret knew at once that they had reached the spot.

"Oh, how beautiful," she said; "how restful and peaceful!"

"What we have to do let us do quickly," Leone said.

She sat down on a large flat stone and Leone, putting the child in her lap, began his work. He climbed the rock and with his hand carefully brushed away a few pine needles that had blown inside. Then he collected a heap of rock fragments and used his pocket knife to uproot some juniper sprigs and myrtle. This done, he took the little body from Margaret's arms and laying it beside her upon the flat stone, opened the velvet covering. "*Amore*," he said, as he gazed upon it with a breaking heart, "*Amore mio!*"

"Precious lamb," whispered Margaret, "oh, precious lamb!"

Was this rigid, silent, waxen thing their happy, rosy, laughing baby of two days ago? The sweet cherubic features, chiseled and so white, reminded its father more than ever of the "Eros" hidden under the old convent on the Palatine. He remembered when his own child had come with its striking resemblance it seemed as if the work of the ancient Greek sculptor had been transformed into flesh and blood; now it had changed back again into marble. He stooped and kissed a forehead scarcely less cold than the little statue and as still.

"Come," he said quickly, as he lifted it in his arms, but Margaret stopped him. "Let me make his bed," she pleaded; "I know how to make him comfortable, wait just a minute."

She dug up lumps of moss and lined the space until she had formed a soft mattress; then she took the blue velvet pall and laid it over the moss, placing the little pillow at the head. "Now," she said, "it is ready. Let me kiss him. Sleep, precious lamb," she murmured, "the angels are with you." And Leone, after straining the little form to his heart in one last, desperate embrace, laid him gently within.

Together they folded the pall over and about him, then they piled up the stones Leone had gathered, building a solid wall, setting in between them the plants that Leone had just uprooted. Then going to the fountain they made cups of their hands, watered them, and stood looking at their work. In a few days the plants would begin to grow and the myrtle would

spread a curtain of greenery over the crevices and no one would suspect that it veiled a beloved child, sleeping his last long sleep.

"Come," said Leone, after a moment, "there is nothing more we can do for him; let us go." But Margaret dropped on her knees before the little tomb. "Precious Lamb," she whispered, "little white, slaughtered lamb, ask a pardon for your parents." Then she rose and followed him.

"When the sun comes up," she thought, "the butterflies will come and the birds, and he will not be lonely." For her heart was torn at leaving him all alone out on the mountain; she would have wished him in the garden. Leone was waiting for her, and putting his arm around her, they walked out of the glen and down the road in silence. The dreadful task was over now, there was no longer any need to nerve himself, and Margaret felt the arm that was about her relaxing its hold.

"*Tesoro*," he said, and his voice was choking, "we have put the *bambino* — to sleep — for — the — last time; *non è ver?*" and laying his head on her shoulder he burst into tears.

The slight girl supported the strong man who leaned his weight upon her and the burden of his heart, his broad shoulders shaking and his whole frame convulsed with sobs.

"Leone, dearest, dearest," she said, "the little one will wake again some day." She put her arms tight around him and tried to soothe him. "There, dearest, there —" as if she were talking to a child, "the *bambino* is safe and happy, only we are sad."

"If — he — had died," he moaned, "I could bear it better; but when he was killed — by heartless, cruel men —"

Margaret was in despair. It was terrible to see Leone give way to his grief. Close by was a weather-beaten shrine which she had not perceived in the faint, gray light when they first came to the spot. It was a figure of the "*Pietà*," so commonly seen and loved in Italy — the Virgin Mother holding the dead Christ in her arms.

"Look, dearest," she said, "over there is one whose only Son was killed, also by cruel men; she knows what you suffer."

Leone, in all his loss of faith and in his agnosticism, had always retained a sort of childish love and veneration for the Blessed Virgin. Now, forgetful of his boast that he had cast all religion aside, he let Margaret lead him to the shrine and unconsciously crossed himself, as he knelt beside her, and the old words came to his lips, "*Sancta Maria, Mater Dei*"; then he poured out his soul; "He was so little, Mother, so helpless and innocent. He was happy as a bird and lovely as the flowers, and they killed him, killed him! And now he is only a dead, crushed thing, which we have hidden away in the rocks! But do thou, Mother, take care of him; he will not know what to do without us and he was always shy —" and more and more he told, all the sadness of his heart flowing out at the feet of the Mother of Sorrows, who seemed to know his pain. Margaret slipped away, feeling that not even she must hear.

There are some people in the world who scoff at the wayside shrines. "Tear them down," they cry; "rank fosterers of idolatry!" But, thank God, there are only some. The wayside shrine with its mute teaching has saved the faith of more men and women than the world dreams of.

Gradually Leone's sobs ceased. He was not kneeling now; he had thrown himself forward, his head on his arm, and was resting.

Two mounted carbineers on patrol duty passed them, looked at the prostrate figure before the shrine and at the girl in the road and took them for the better class of peasants, as Margaret was hatless, with a scarf thrown over her head and wearing a short skirt, and Leone, dressed in his old brown knee breeches and velveteen jacket. Some lovers' quarrel, they supposed, and the man was penitent now, swearing before the Madonna that he would never strike his sweetheart again; but the girl was a dainty bit to be left too long unattended on the highway; he had better rouse himself and look after her. When

## *The Tomb on the Mountain* 241

they had gone Margaret came back to him; she was greatly fatigued and they had a long walk before them. "Come, dearest," she said. He raised his head, and seeming to have forgotten where he was, took her outstretched hand and rose to his feet.

They walked up the road for a time, then entered the woods now all astir. Birds were twittering, happy squirrels bounded from tree to tree, young hares ran nimbly across their path; all rejoicing in their life, but the man and woman in their midst each thought of another little being who awoke like them at dawn, rejoicing as they, now cold and still. On emerging from the dense shades, they were almost blinded by the sunlight.

When they returned to the castle Margaret was so exhausted that after taking the breakfast Lisa had brought to her room she had thrown herself upon the lounge and fallen into a heavy sleep which lasted until mid-day. She was awakened by a noise.

"What are you doing, Leone?" she asked.

Drawers and chests stood open with the appearance of having been ransacked; on the floor was a sheet filled with various articles which he was about to tie into a pack. She caught sight of small garments, a little wooden cart, a woolly dog, a rag doll, a string of spools, little socks and shoes and caps — everything, in fact, that had belonged to their child, or that he had ever used.

"What *are* you doing?" she repeated.

"I am collecting his toys and clothes," Leone made answer; "I am taking them away."

"Where?"

"Where I shall never see them again," he replied, as he took up the corners of the sheet and began to tie them.

"Oh, don't do that!" she cried; "I made all those clothes, Giacinta and I; they are good, and I want his toys. He loved his little cart; he was just learning to fill it with grass, and that fur kitten Carlotta gave him, he loved that, too; he took it to

sleep with him. Oh, Leone, for pity's sake, what are you going to do?" She rose from the couch and looked into the pile. "Oh," she cried, "you have his powder-box there, his own little mug — everything, everything!"

"Hush, hush," he said, as he knotted the four corners securely; "hush, *Tesoro*, I have taken everything on purpose; I will lose my mind unless I can forget, and these things will forever remind me."

"Then let us give his little clothes to the poor; there is many a child suffering for them."

"Do you think I would ever see another child in what my son has worn? No, *carissima*, you shall have all my next magazine money to give to the poor, only do not hinder me now; I must forget — forget."

"You are certainly crazy," she said, "and I think you are cruel to take away his things — you shall not do it —"

He had the pack on his shoulder by this time, and was leaving the room. Margaret hastily slipped on her boots, and followed him. He was not to be seen, but she could hear his echoing footsteps upon the stone floor of the corridor; yet he kept some distance ahead of her, and reaching the outer door she saw him making his way toward the ruins. She redoubled her steps and hurried after him. He stopped near a pile of brushwood. She supposed that he was going to throw the sheet and its contents down the bottomless well and ran as quickly as she could. She saw him stoop down and do something and then there was smoke and a crackling. He had set the bundle on fire!

"Oh! oh!" she cried, bounding to the spot, "what a dreadful thing to do! Oh! you have no right to do this; his things are mine as much as yours, oh, I shall have nothing left of my baby!" She tried to draw the pack toward her, but he had built a ring of dried twigs around it and the smoke was so thick it blinded her.

"Hush, *Tesoro, cara mia*," was all he said, as he threw on

the brushwood and watched the lapping flames grow bigger. "I must have everything destroyed, everything."

Just then the pile seemed to ignite all at once, a great flame shot upward and the sheet burst open and from out of it fell a tiny kid shoe, the first the child had ever worn, that Margaret had made herself and cross-stitched with blue silk. The little shoe fell at her feet, unperceived by Leone. She snatched it eagerly and holding it tightly to her heart fled away, back to the house and up to her own room and there, throwing herself once more upon the lounge, the tears that had been so long denied her, came at last, and she kissed the little shoe again and again as she sobbed aloud.

And Leone, over by the ruins, with a stony expression, stood watching his work of destruction. The corners of the sheet curled up and burned like paper to ashes, also the small garments, made with so much care. The rapacious flames next caught the wooden cart, that only two days ago the *bambino* had pulled after him, the rag doll, the toy kitten, a miniature brush and comb and a painted powder box — all went, until there was nothing more for the fire to consume. Then the flames died out and he looked at what was left, a charred, smouldering, blackened mass. He took a stick and stirred the débris. Something white caught his eye; he picked it up; what was it?

A wee, soft shoe, made of a glove, stitched in blue and kicked out at the toes; it was just a little charred on one side. How did it manage to escape the flames? He could not tell, the only thing left! For a moment the tears glistened in his eyes, but he dashed them away. With a quick, desperate gesture he pressed it to his lips and then thrust it in his bosom.

## CHAPTER XXI

### THE GLOOM OF THE WINTER

Forth from the wind-swept country of my heart,  
Fly fast swift wings;  
From thence the summers and their suns depart,  
Here no bird sings.

MOULTON.

The picture of "Springtime" was never finished.

From the first Fauvel had been dissatisfied with the work. Carlotta had never been his ideal of the female figure, and Leone, after the death of the baby, kept a look of stony despondency that was "impossible" for "Springtime."

Leone shed no more tears, but Margaret could not cease weeping. There was not a trace of the little one left; whatever had escaped Leone's grasp when he made the funeral pyre of the child's effects, had been spirited away by him afterwards. The old gilded cradle was again relegated to the forgotten lumber room far off in another part of the castle, and all that remained to Margaret of her baby was one little shoe, which she kept hidden safely where he would never find it. Also her conscience troubled her. Had she been a good mother? she asked herself, had she loved her child as a mother should? Leone had openly accused her of lacking motherly love, and she had intuitively felt that the others agreed.

Oh, if she could have him back! She would take him proudly in her arms and let come who might she would say, "Yes, he is mine, my love, my own son!"

"You will injure your eyes," Fauvel said to her at last, then took her to his apartment and put some cooling drops into them. "Do not cry any more, *ma chère*. The little one never had a pang or a sorrow, he never had a sick day, he knew nothing but happiness, devoted care and love — 'Amore.'

## *The Gloom of the Winter* 245

Love he was surrounded with, and 'Love' he was. You have yourself to think of and Leone, and if you care at all for me, stop the tears now, for I do not like to see your sweet face disfigured."

So Margaret dried her eyes and like Leone wept no more, but in her heart was continual self-reproach and sadness. And Fauvel, watching her closely, realized that some change must be made; she needed diversion and gaiety and he intended she should have both. She had stood the test he had prepared for her, the test of her love for Leone, a long severe trial, and she had come through the fire like pure gold.

This year he was going to Paris, Vienna, and home to Brussels; he had a full and busy winter planned; it would be six or seven months before he should be again in Italy and if he found them as devoted upon his return, then the welfare and future of the Belmontes should be his first consideration. But he said nothing of this to them, as he did not believe in talking until he was ready to act.

Nothing further could be learned about the men in the automobile. But Leone, thirsting for revenge, did not give up his idea of some day finding them, and went constantly to the village and other mountain hamlets, telling his story over, making inquiries and inciting the peasants to a hatred of automobiles. Also he was bent upon punishing the dwarf who he declared had been the evil genius in the destruction of his child.

Carlotta encouraged him in his wild vagaries. Shortly after the tragedy Giacinta left. Her sick brother had written begging her to return, so she parted from Margaret with kisses and tears, promising to return as soon as she could be spared.

Carlotta, after much reflection as to whether she would cancel her concert engagements and spend the winter between her father's humble home and the castle, in order to be near Belmonte, came to the conclusion that it would be the height of folly to lose so much good money! Belmonte would be there in the spring and she could cut her season short, if she became

impatient to see him; therefore she, too, departed, and lastly Fauvel.

After Leone and Margaret were left alone Rocca Serrata seemed indeed deserted; but Leone did his best to rouse and cheer Margaret, for he too suffered from conscience. He had been selfish in his monopoly of the little one, "enormously selfish," as Fauvel had said, and the latter had also told him that he had done a heartless, cruel thing in destroying all her baby's clothes and toys, and he took great care that she should never see the tiny shoe that the flames had spared. He was ashamed of his weakness in treasuring it, since he had deprived her of everything.

He endeavored to make up for his conduct by trying to entertain and amuse her, in order that she might forget.

The sound of battledore and shuttlecock was again heard in the corridor or great hall. Also he taught her to use the foil, as Fauvel had taught him until he had become an expert fencer. And when they were tired of violent exercise there were books and cards or driving to Fossato to see the *Cinamettografo*.\* They were more like lovers again, as their differences over the child were the only things that had ever ruffled their affection, and now that the occasion of these was removed all was serene between them. There was but one dangerous subject and that was the dwarf. Margaret would not listen to the idea that his appearance the night before the child's death had anything to do with the tragedy; the creature had not been seen or heard of since, and Margaret changed the conversation as tactfully as she could whenever he was mentioned, as it only made them quarrel.

Every year Leone had found great pleasure in going down to the *poderi*\*\* in the valley and offering his services to help in the vintage. He knew many of the farmers and vine-growers and it is quite customary in Italy for the upper classes to assist

\* Motion pictures.

\*\* Sort of farms.

in the grape-gathering as a diversion. He dearly loved the sylvan life and the events that each change of season brought forth. This year he persuaded Margaret to go with him, but she did not find it the pastime that he did. It was manual labor for her, cutting the heavy purple and white clusters and staining her hands and clothing, and though it was interesting for a few days as an experience, she soon tired of it and she insisted now that he go without her.

She often longed to visit the spot where the baby lay, but when she broached the subject Leone shook his head. "It is too soon," he said, "I could not go back there yet; wait until spring, *Tesoro*, then I will take thee." Once she suggested that she could find the way by herself, but he exclaimed with horror that she must not think of such a thing, the mountains were full of rough men at this season, hunters, trappers, charcoal-burners, wood choppers, etc., a lawless, uncivilized set that kept the carbineers busy. "It might be death to thee or worse," he declared. "*Pazienzi*,\* I will take thee there in the spring."

The falling leaves, the leaden clouds, the departure of the song-birds, the whole autumnal aspect of the country, added to her depression, and when winter finally set in a gloom impenetrable seemed to rest upon the castle. When the out-door interests ceased for Leone he shut himself up with his writing again, working hours at a time upon his manuscripts. This he was obliged to do, as he had become a regular contributor to two magazines and a paper. Margaret, therefore, was left alone most of the time. She missed Giacinta sadly and she had really nothing to do now. Keeping the baby's wardrobe supplied and in order had been her chief occupation and pleasure. She had tried to make over some of her own clothes, but without Giacinta to direct it was difficult, and she became discouraged and put the sewing away. She then took to reading. Fauvel kept them supplied with all the latest novels and she read constantly French and Italian, living in a world of fiction and

\* Patience.

became so absorbed in them that she would read by candlelight at night after going to bed; as a result she strained her eyes, and was forced to give up reading for a while.

The winter was terribly severe. There were times when they were literally snowed-in. They could not get to the village for fresh food and no one dared mount to them, therefore they had to live on salt-fish and salt-meats and whatever supplies the storehouse contained, until the storms abated. Also the mails were delayed, and when there was a respite from the snow and winds Leone and Beppo would venture down together to the post-office in old Santoni's house, to get letters that were weeks old and papers in which the news of the world had grown stale. This was the third winter that Margaret and Leone had spent at Rocca Serrata, but the previous ones had been mild compared to this. The wind rushed and whistled round the old fortress like a powerful spirit bent upon destroying what was left of it. Casements, the fastenings of which had worn out, would bang back and forth, breaking the glass, while icy blasts swept down the long corridors, rattling doors and howling around the tower stairs like souls in distress. Meanwhile Margaret would sit for hours, close to the fire, without occupation or amusement, a prey to her own dreary thoughts.

"Could she go on forever, living like this?" she asked herself, was she never again to have any society or friends? The same life day after day, the same landscapes, mountains, mountains, mountains! White in winter, purple in summer. Was she never to exchange an idea, except with Leone, Carlotta, or Fauvel? She began to long intensely to be once more in the vortex of the world; during these years of her retreat disasters through the forces of nature and the carelessness of man, had rent and wrung it, marvellous inventions and deeds had stirred it, but only echoes of them had reached them here. She longed to get back to that world, but how could it be done? Leone could not be seen in any of the large Italian cities and run the risk of becoming known and she would never leave

him. He had become a part of her existence and life would be insupportable without him. She loved his beauty, his originality, even his faults. Fauvel had often said that after the lapse of five or six years Leone would be so forgotten that they might go about with safety and had hinted at a life at Brussels, but that would be two or three years yet to wait; how could she stand it? Then a positive nostalgia made her almost physically ill. She longed for her native city, big, busy, noisy, splendid New York, the shops, the theatres, and more than all she yearned to see her mother and sister; their letters had become almost tantalizing.

In one Josephine wrote how lavishly Cousin Cornelia Ward was entertaining, and added, "she might as well spend her money, you know, as she has no one to save it for. Wallace Grant still manages her affairs and her income has more than doubled; he is a wizard for money-making. He has made piles of it lately, and is building a stunning house on Park Avenue as he intends to live here now. Everyone is wondering who is to be the mistress of it? Cousin Cornelia told me confidentially that he has never ceased to care for you. I believe if you should come home and be nice to him he would probably ask you again — oh, my dear, money is such a power! I don't see how you can remain contented where you are, being a 'companion' all your young life —"

These home letters went far to increase Margaret's longing and despondency. Money! Josephine was right, what a power it is! But she wished her sister would stop writing about Wallace Grant. If she and Leone had money they could travel together far off, in strange and interesting countries, instead of wasting their youth in exile here, in this forlorn, ghostly place; then she sneezed and shivered, as a gust of wind blew open the door, and she thought how formerly everything about the castle that had seemed picturesquely ruinous, now she only saw as decaying age.

"Do you ever think of the future, Leone?" she asked one

evening as they were sitting together, close to the huge fire-place in the cedar-room. Neither of them had spoken for nearly an hour, simply because there was nothing to talk about. Every once in a while Leone would take up a handful of pine cones from a sacque lying near and throw them between the logs; they would sputter and burst, give off a pleasant odor and start a brighter blaze. He did not answer for a moment and she repeated her question.

"Yes, of course I do," was the reply.

"But I mean seriously," she said, "for I think of the future a great deal. What is to become of you and me? Are we to live forever upon the charity of Fauvel?"

He looked up at her, "I don't understand you," he said, rather coldly. "This is our home and why should you call it 'charity' that we are living upon? Fauvel has made big sums from the sales of my pictures, so I feel that I earn the living for both of us. Besides, I am the heir of Rocca Serrata."

"Don't be too sure of your inheritance. Fauvel is whimsical, he may marry; many a confirmed bachelor does, though declaring he never will. Do you suppose his wife would have us around? What is more, your youth and good looks are not going to last forever and then your commercial value as his model will be gone."

"I am not played out yet, Margherita," he said, throwing back his head with that proud gesture peculiar to himself, "I have several years left."

"Of course, but I told you I was thinking of the future. Now suppose you should be mistaken about being his heir, or he should tire of us, what then?"

"*Cara mia*, why do you speak of such improbabilities? But if all this should happen I still have my writing; I make more and more from it every year."

"But we could not possibly live upon what you make; it hardly keeps us in clothes and a few little extra comforts."

"I do all I can, *tesoro*," he answered. "If I had money thou should'st have it all; for my part I am content."

"You have no ambition," she replied almost sharply. "Don't you long for something more than these old walls?"

"No," he said simply, "why should I, you are here."

When he made answer like this it always touched her and provoked her at the same time. Neither spoke again for a few moments, while the fire crackled and the clock ticked, counting away their life seconds, Margaret thought, in tedious monotony. Then the shrill, squeaking voice of the macaw broke the silence. "Fleurette," she screeched, "Fleurette, ah — *tu es belle*, Fleurette!"

"Poor Fleurette does not get much flattery now her master is away," Margaret remarked, "so she has to remind us that she is beautiful."

Margaret did not like the bird; she thought her a nuisance and was afraid of her sharp beak, but for Fauvel's sake she was well taken care of between them, though they seldom noticed or spoke to her. Sometimes, however, she amused them by mimicking the various members of the household. She was in a talkative humor to-night, and bursts of French, Italian, and German came forth; then she began to whistle the "*Mar-seillaise*," finishing up with the "*Marcia Reale*" which Leone had taught her. Her rendering of it was not quite true, so he went over to her stand and whistled the King's Royal March, while she listened with her head on one side. But she could not be induced to try it over again, just continued to look at him peculiarly; then all at once she opened her beak and in a soft baby voice that struck the hearts of both of them, she called — "'Oné, 'Oné!" and suddenly, changing to his own tones: "*Amore, Amore. Vieni qui bambino mio, angelino* —" \*

"Stop," Leone cried furiously. "Stop! That name and those words you shall not say, *uccellaccio*." \*\* And picking up

\* Amore, Amore, come here baby, little angel.

\*\* Horrid bird.

a book he hurled it at her; but she dodged it, flew at him with every feather starting out in her in mad rage and settled upon his wrist, giving it a stinging bite. He screamed with pain and beat her off. Margaret rushed to him; it was an ugly bite and Clemente was called, who advised heating an iron red-hot and cauterizing the wound, which was accordingly done while Margaret held his arm, the smell of burning flesh making her feel faint and ill. And the culprit watched the proceedings with her bead-like eyes from a dark corner at the top of the wainscoting. Leone was heroic enough during the operation but became very nervous afterwards, was sure he would have hydrophobia, or lockjaw, and fumed himself into a fever, as many healthy people, unfamiliar with pain do, when any slight accident happens, altogether acting like an unreasonable child.

"I will wring Fleurette's neck," he declared, as Margaret assisted him to undress in his helplessness, with his right arm in a sling, "as soon as my hand is well."

"If you do, Fauvel will wring yours," she replied; "he loves Fleurette. How was that poor silly bird to know she was wounding our feelings? You lost your temper and you are punished for it."

"I will," he declared again; "I will kill her."

"Nonsense, nonsense," said Margaret soothingly, as she fluffed up his pillow and got him finally to bed.

"I will," he repeated darkly, "and I will kill that hideous *mal occhio*,\* that scurvy dwarf, that demon who brought misfortune to this house if he ever shows his face here again, and I will kill the slayer of my child!"

"Dear me," she exclaimed, "what wholesale murder you are going into!" She always tried to make light of it when one of these revengeful moods took possession of him and shame him into a different frame of mind, but to-night he was suffering physically and was harder to manage. "It is lucky for you," she continued, "that you have no enemies, or they might

\* Evil eye.

make trouble for you, hearing these perpetual threats to kill."

"You are so meek, Margherita," he sniffed; "you would let any one do you an injury and never think of avenging yourself. You have no spirit!"

"Oh, yes I have," she retorted, "but I am no assassin." Then she remembered the quieting medicine that Fauvel sometimes gave and after two or three doses, long past midnight he fell asleep.

It was nearly two o'clock when Margaret blew out her candle and got into bed. She was just becoming warm and drowsy, when she remembered that they had never thought to put Fleurette in her cage for the night and cover it with a blanket, as was always done in winter; also that they had forgotten to close the window that had been opened to air the room from the smell of burning flesh, after Clemente had applied the heated iron to the injured wrist. When the fire died out Fleurette would certainly take cold and lose her voice; or, worse still, she might escape through the open window; half the bars were gone, broken and rotted away with age; she had not had her wings clipped since Fauvel left and she could easily fly out and perish in the snow.

"Oh, dear," sighed Margaret from the depths of her down quilt, "must I get out of bed to wait on a bird! And it's horribly spooky to go downstairs all alone at this hour in the dark."

It would be cruel to wake Leone, she thought, after he had suffered so much. Well, there was no help for it, she must go down and see that Fleurette was safely disposed of for the night; very reluctantly she threw off her coverings, put her feet into her worsted slippers, lighted a candle and slipped into a warm dressing gown.

"Oh, you nuisance," she said, as she passed into the draughty corridor, shielding the light with her hand to keep it from blowing out and feeling the cold of the cement flooring go through and through her, "to think that I should have to take

all this trouble for a miserable bird; but then it is for Fauvel's sake," and she drew her wrapper tighter around her. How horribly dark it was, and how still! If the castle were haunted, this was exactly the time for the ghosts to appear, and she thought of all the blood-curdling stories she had heard of Rocca Serrata.

For a moment she felt as if she could not go on and was about to turn back when she thought again of Fauvel and of how many times he had put himself out for her, also of the value of his pet. A macaw, speaking three languages, was worth a great deal.

How she wished she had the price that Fleurette represented, and as she went on down the stairs the longing for money came again upon her so strongly that she almost forgot her fears.

## CHAPTER XXII

### THE LOST JEWELS

"There seated by the fire,  
A form of impish mold,  
His looks would fear inspire  
Despite the tale he told  
Of the sparkle of the diamond,  
And the glitter of the gold."

The door of the cedar room was open and as Margaret crossed the threshold she was possessed with the uncanny feeling that she was not alone, but when she swept the candle around there was no one to be seen. The fire was not yet out, for from behind the high-backed armchairs where she and Leone had been sitting came a ruddy glow. Fleurette, the macaw, was perched upon her stand, but her feathers were ruffled and she had the air of perceiving something that displeased her.

Margaret set the candle upon the cabinet, held out her arm for the bird, coaxed her upon it and shut her in the cage, arranging the blanket over it, all the time her heart beating with nervous apprehension, she could not tell why. She must close the window, then how she would scurry down the corridor and up the stairs, safely back to her own room. Going over to the window she made it fast by turning long iron rods into rusty sockets, still obsessed with the feeling that there was some one else in the room. As she turned and took up her candle again she heard a sigh, and stood stock-still. Could it be Fleurette? No; it came from the direction of the fireplace. Lifting the light high, she peered around the back of the armchairs, and lying in a heap, in front of the expiring embers, saw a creature covered with a goat-skin mantle that was oozing water from the melting snow upon it. One long arm was stretched out and in his hand he grasped an iron bar which he had evidently

wrenched from the window. He was asleep and as she looked again she recognized the dwarf, the *Jettatura*, as Carlotta and Leone called him. For a second her heart ceased to beat and she broke into a cold perspiration. Oh, this was horrible!

But Margaret was naturally brave in any real danger.

It was a relief to learn that a human being and not a ghost had given that sigh, yet the helplessness of her situation came over her appallingly; he could strike her senseless in an instant with that piece of iron. She might scream but no one would hear her; Leone's door, far off upstairs, was tightly closed, and the dose she had given him made him sleep soundly. A bell cord, attached to a series of wires leading to Clemente's quarters, hung from an opposite wall, but she would have to cross the length of the room to reach it, and in the cabinet near her was a pistol.

She moved toward the weapon, her soft slippers making no noise, and cautiously opened the door; but just as her hand touched it a log from the fire fell heavily, lighting the room with its sparks, and the dwarf awoke, springing to his feet. Margaret's limbs were trembling so that she could scarcely stand, but the arm she raised was steady as she put her finger on the trigger of the pistol and pointed it at him. She had never used a pistol and did not even know if it were loaded, but she made the bluff. He saw her and saw also the pistol, then staggered back, threw down his weapon which resounded upon the floor, and fell on his knees.

"Signora," he cried, "do not kill me, I am defenceless; I would not harm you if I could, I mean harm to no one. I saw the window open and the firelight tempted me, so I climbed up the dead vines and came in. Signora, have mercy!"

Margaret did not move; she felt her strength returning while the fellow knelt, his arms stretched out in a pleading attitude.

"You have been ordered away from here," she said. "You *know* that, and yet you come back again, and like a thief."

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"I am no thief, signora; ah, have pity upon me, an unfortunate, and do not send me away; I am almost dead of cold and hunger. No one will give me shelter because they think I bring them ill luck. Ah, *per l'amor di Dio*, do not turn me out!"

Margaret had lowered her arm but still kept her hold on the pistol. "For that same reason," she said, "I cannot let you stay; the Signore, my husband, believes you have the evil eye, and your life would not be safe if he should find you here, after he had forbidden you to come."

"Alas, signora, I would not harm a fly or bring ill luck to any one. Do not turn me out this bitter night, *Gentelissima*. I swear by the Madonna that I will harm no one."

"But why are you here at all?" she asked. "Last summer you came to dig for herbs, you told us, but there are no herbs at this season. Now you sneak indoors when every one is sleeping; it is the act of a thief, I say. Suppose I were to pull that bellcord and arouse the steward, he would send you to the jail at Fossato."

"Ah, Signora," he cried, in distress, "do not give me up. Let me stay a while, just a little while. I will not show myself to the young Signore Illustrissimo. There are plenty of places where I could hide — the old guardroom away up on the top floor of the keep, in the north wing, or the chapel."

"Do you know the castle?" asked Margaret, astonished.

"I know it well, Signora."

"Stand up," she said, "and explain yourself."

She felt perfectly secure now with the pistol in her hand. It was a small Derringer, loaded, and she had lost her fear of the dwarf, for somehow his face, though hideous, had an intelligent and kindly look and he was absolutely in her power.

"So," she continued, as he got upon his feet, "you know something of Rocca Serrata?"

"I know many things, Signora."

"Tell me one," she said imperatively, "and unless you make

me a satisfactory answer I shall be obliged to give you up. Why do you persist in coming here? You must have some special reason; is there anything you wish to take away?"

"*Gentilissima*, I wish to take away only what is mine."

"I do not understand —"

"Long ago when I was a youth I lived here. Something of value belonging to me was lost and after years of toil, privation and hardships, I returned to seek it. Signora, I swear by all the saints that what I say is true."

"— is true," echoed Fleurette from underneath her covering. The dwarf started nervously.

"It is only a talking bird," said Margaret; "she sometimes repeats after us. What is it that belongs to you?"

He did not answer, but shaking and trembling, put his hand on a chair for support.

"What is the matter?" asked Margaret.

"I am exhausted, Signora, and frozen; I have not eaten since yesterday morning."

"Go over and sit by the fire and do not stir," she said, "and I will give you something."

In the cabinet was a bottle of Marsala and a plate of biscuits; she poured some of the wine into a glass and handed it to him with the plate.

"Take this," she said kindly.

He swallowed it quickly. "Ah, noble lady, how can poor Ferruccio ever thank you?"

"By telling me the truth. If there is anything in the house that belongs to you, I suppose you can prove it?"

"I can. Will not the Signora be seated? It is not fitting that Ferruccio should sit while she stands."

Margaret had stood over him like a watch-dog while he had been eating and drinking; now he seemed somewhat revived, so she seated herself in an armchair, while he squatted by the fire at her feet. The clock in the hall struck three; but she was wide awake, had lost her fear of him and felt only pity for the

poor, abject creature whose words seemed to have a veracity she could not doubt, and she was curious to hear what he had to tell; so still keeping her hold on the pistol she bade him proceed.

"It was fifty years ago, Signora, that Count Renaldo Steno of Venice brought me to this castle to wait upon a young and beautiful lady called Donna Lorina. Count Steno was a gambler, a drunkard, and a scoundrel. He came into possession of Rocca Serrata through a gambling debt, but he never cared for it, and only lived here because it was a safe place." He began to go into much detail about the Donna Lorina, and her runaway love affair with the Count.

"But the thing that is yours, Ferruccio," Margaret interrupted, "that you have come to take away, what is it?"

"*Pazienza*, lady, it is a long story."

"It seems like an interesting one," she replied. She was surprised at the intelligent way the dwarf spoke. He was not the ignorant, stupid vagrant she had imagined. "Do you feel strong enough to lift that log?" she asked him; "we must not let the fire go out."

The dwarf smiled as he moved and took up easily a heavy log which he threw on the dying fire. Soon it was crackling and blazing, giving light and warmth.

"Go on," she said.

He proceeded with the tale of the unhappy lady whose lover had grown weary of her.

He described her. "She was small and not unlike the Signora, and had beautiful long dark hair, and often wore it as the Signora has hers."

Margaret's hair was unbound and hung down in two long loose braids, as she always arranged it for the night. "And, Signora," he added, "you make me think of her, for your heart is kind like hers."

"Never mind me," she said, "but go on."

"A groom, Giovanni, told me that Count Steno had spent so

much money that he was obliged to stay in this lonely place until he caught up, but when the second autumn came he went away, saying he would return in the spring."

"Will you ever come to your own part?" Margaret said, a little impatiently.

"Ah, *gentilissima*, unless I tell the whole you will not believe me."

"Yes, I will," she said; "only let me know what it is that belongs to you, that I may get it for you and let you go."

A strange look came over the face of the dwarf as he answered, "No, Signora, that you could never do without my assistance."

"Why not?"

"Because you would not know how to find it."

"But what is it, what is it? I insist upon knowing. I have been very patient with you, but I must know at once why you have broken into the house and what you wish to take from it."

He leaned forward and looked her straight in the eyes, as he said, "The jewels of Donna Lorina!"

Margaret rose from her seat in astonishment. "What!" she cried, "the jewels of this unfortunate lady? You said it was something that belonged to you; how can you possibly make this out?"

"They do belong to me, Signora; she gave them to me."

"Oh, you cannot expect me to believe this, that any lady would give a fortune in jewels, to you, her menial servant!"

"I told you, Signora," he said very gently, "that you must hear the whole story in order to believe me. The jewels are mine. No word of untruth have I spoken as God is my witness."

"But where are they?" Margaret gasped, her eyes wide open in wonderment; "where are they?"

"That, Signora, is my secret."

"Go on, go on," she said eagerly, as she reseated herself. "I will listen to all you have to tell."

"*Buonissimo!*" he replied, in a tone that one uses when a point is gained, and settling back comfortably against the pile of logs, he proceeded: "Before Count Steno left he took me to one side and told me that he left the lady and her jewels in my care, that I was to be responsible to him for both. After he had gone, Donna Lorina kept to her room and cried all the time. That was a long and lonely winter; she seemed to live only for his letters, which came seldom and between each one a longer time would go by. There were Veronica, her maid; Giovanni, the groom; the cook and myself; we had one another, but the poor lady had no one. Giovanni was handsome and copied the ways of a gentleman, and Veronica was pretty and lively, and they were betrothed. They hated it here and said they would rather lose their positions than lose their minds in this wilderness, and one day we found them gone. There were only the cook and me left. Donna Lorina now had no woman to wait upon her and had to do many things for herself which she had never done before. When Spring came she began to expect the Count, but April, May, and June passed and he did not come. She spent hours at the top of the watch-tower looking out for him and would not come down even for meals, so I used to carry a tray to her and sometimes she would call out as I was on my way up, 'He is coming, Ferruccio,' and we would see a cloud of dust in the distance and wait and watch together, but it would prove to be only some peasant driving an ox team; no one ever came up the hill to the castle and each letter kept putting off his visit.

"One night about midsummer Nicola, the cook, and I were talking matters over. Said he: 'It is my belief that the master does not intend to return at all and that Donna Lorina is deserted.' We had not been paid our wages for six months, and the sum of money the Count had left with Nicola for household expenses was almost gone. He went every now and then to Fossato to buy supplies and once at a *trattoria* he heard some one say that Rinaldo Steno had lost everything and was

fleeing from his creditors, but another remarked it was not so, as he had boasted of having a fortune in rare jewels that he could turn into money at any time. Nicola was about to say that he was in the employ of Count Steno and knew of the jewels and where they were, but bethought himself in time that the men might follow him and rob and murder us. Said I to him, 'Donna Lorina is not deserted; the master will come again and we will be paid, for he wants the jewels, even if he does not want the lady.' Well, she still kept her watch from the tower, weak and ill as she was. At last at the turn of the year something happened.

"That afternoon (it seems like yesterday, Signora, as I sit here once more in this familiar place), Donna Lorina was asleep upstairs and I busy in the kitchen, when I heard the sound of horse's hoofs and ran out to find it was Giovanni, the runaway, all dust and travel-stained. He told me that the master was in Venice again and would be at Rocca Serrata in a few days, and he cursed him with black curses.

"Count Steno had made love to Veronica, Giovanni's betrothed, and that foolish one had listened and gone off with him and he could find no trace of her; most likely she was shut up in some other castle as Donna Lorina was here, for the Count had announced his engagement to an heiress, and they were to be married before Advent.

"Giovanni raved, walking up and down. I pitied the poor fellow.

" 'He is having one last orgy in Venice,' he went on, 'and within the week he will be here — for what?' and he stopped in the middle of the floor, 'for what? For the jewels of Donna Lorina, to give to his accursed bride.' We heard a shriek and a fall — our backs had been to the door — we turned, and there lay the lady unconscious."

"Oh, poor thing, poor thing!" said Margaret.

"When my lady rose from the couch where we had laid her she left the room, leaning against the wall as she went. I ran

to help her, but she shook me off. I followed her at a distance. In her room I found her seated in front of a table, leaning upon it, and before her in a heap lay all her jewels. She did not raise her head, so I spoke; she stared at me, then burst into wild laughter — her mind had gone."

"Oh, Ferruccio," cried Margaret, "what a horrible story!"

"It is, Signora. 'Donna Lorina,' said I, 'what are you going to do with these?' And I touched the great pile of sparkle and glitter; 'some one means to steal them.' 'Rinaldo, Rinaldo,' she screamed, stood up and put her hands to her head, 'he is going to marry another woman, I heard him say so, Giovanni —'

"'Do not let him have them, *Excellenza*,' I said; 'they are yours, he has no right to take them.'

"'But,' she moaned, 'I do not want them; I only want his love.'

"'But,' I told her, 'you must hide them at once, in some place out of the way and safe; do not tell any of us where you put them just yet; so that when the robber comes we can say with truth we do not know. Do you understand? — Hark!' I said, for I had heard some one coming upstairs. 'Quick, lady,' said I, pulling an empty pigskin pouch from my pocket, and I swept that fortune off the table into it and put it in her hand. 'Quick, Donna Lorina,' I said again, 'run and hide this from all of us.' With that I left her."

The dwarf's story went swifter now. The lady had gone quite mad after she had indeed hidden her treasure — where, no one in this world knew.

"Oh," said Margaret, shuddering, as he told of the Donna Lorina's incoherent talk and wild laughter, "this makes my blood curdle, to think I am living in the very place where such frightful things happened."

"It is all true," the dwarf said solemnly.

"All true," came from a muffled voice the other side of the room. This time they both started.

"Be quiet, Fleurette," called Margaret, realizing in a second from whence it came.

"Good night, Margherita, good night!" the bird screeched in a high key.

"Go on, Ferruccio," Margaret said nervously; "I am anxious to hear the end."

Ferruccio told how he was obliged to kill Giovanni in self-defense and how at last he wanted to get the crazed creature away from the castle, where she could have care. Money was needed to accomplish this, and he tried to get her to disclose what she had done with her fortune. But when he asked where were the jewels — she nodded to herself slyly, "Where he will never find them," she said, "for his bride."

"Where?" I persisted," Ferruccio continued narratively, "but Donna Lorina only laughed, repeating, 'Where, where.' '*Per l'amor di Dio*,' I cried, alarmed, 'tell me the place that I may go and bring them to you. With the sale of one stone I can get you away from here; there will be money enough to live comfortably' — and now mark, Signora, what she said, and her tone was like Gospel truth: 'They are safe, Ferruccio, for Cupid himself guards them where dolphins swim. But they are yours when you find them,' she cried, and laughed aloud. 'No, no, lady,' said I, 'where dolphins swim there must be water, and there is no water in the castle.' But she insisted, 'Cupid guards them where dolphins swim.' And again she said they were mine when I found them, and again she laughed and laughed.

"I tried to make her tell me by asking her where she had gone the day before, and begged her to speak sensibly, but she paid no attention, rambling on that it made no difference, as she would soon die, that she knew of a place to die in where no one would ever find her. Then she suddenly sprang up wildly and bounded into the next room, slamming the door behind her. This was so unlike her that I could hardly get feet to follow her. I opened the closed door in time to see her

rush through another and so on through room after room, banging doors behind her. There was but one left, and this she slammed to so violently that it was hard to open, but in that second I heard a creaking in the room beyond and when I entered she was nowhere to be seen."

Here again the dwarf paused for breath. Margaret had unconsciously leaned forward in her chair, her whole attention concentrated on his words.

"Of course," he went on, "I thought she was playing me some trick, and hiding. That room was the last one of the apartment and there was but one door, the one through which I had entered. I called, I looked behind all the furniture, I moved everything, I searched even back of the curtains, searched everywhere — calling and calling — but she had disappeared utterly. Listen, Signora, I have almost finished. For three days and nights I searched, scarcely stopping for food or sleep. I searched all over the castle, every place that I knew of where I could make my way. I called and shouted her name, and it came echoing back to me through the horrible silence and emptiness, all the while feeling the folly of looking for her anywhere save in that one room and the end of each search brought me back to the spot where she had disappeared, to go over the same ground again and again. It looked as if the walls must have opened and swallowed her up. Those days were terrible. On the afternoon of the third day I saw a party of horsemen coming up the mountain. With the field glass I recognized Count Steno and his friends."

Margaret rose abruptly. "I have heard enough," she said severely; "your story is trash. You probably killed the lady as well as Giovanni and disposed of her jewels long ago."

"Signora," the fellow cried, rising also, "I declare to you — I swear to you it is all true."

"All true," was heard again from the cage in the corner.

Margaret turned irritably. "I wish you would be still, Fleurette"; then again addressing the dwarf: "If your story

is true, you must surely know what became of Donna Lorina."

"Stay, Signora, only hear me to the end."

He told of his escape from the castle and the Count; of how he had been charged with murdering the lost lady and the theft of the jewels, and of how he had gone far away till he knew that the Count and all who remembered the old story were dead or gone from the region.

"Two years ago I landed in Calabria," he concluded, "and have been walking back ever since."

"But Donna Lorina, Ferruccio, the mystery of her disappearance must have been cleared up?"

"No, *gentilissima*, for I went straight to the monastery, and asked to see a monk who knew us all. I told the monk the true story in the confessional. He was very old, but he remembered the scandal when the Count had to fight the charge of himself murdering the lady. No, Donna Lorina is still in the castle, and I have come to find her."

"Impossible!" Margaret exclaimed. "I have lived here for a long time and there is no trace of any one but ourselves."

"Rocca Serrata is very large and the aged monk was a wise man; he told me there are often rooms and passages secretly arranged in old buildings such as this. Does the Signora know thoroughly all parts of this great house?"

"No," Margaret answered thoughtfully. "I confess I do not. I know there are many closed apartments, some walled up, in fact."

"*Buonissimo*," he said quickly.

"The Signora doubtless knows where these apartments are and she will help me in my search."

"I?"

"Yes, Signora."

"But the lady cannot be living all this time; you said this happened fifty years ago—"

"I did not say I expected to find her living—"

"Oh, this is horrible, Ferruccio!" Margaret exclaimed, as

he divined his meaning. "You want my help in searching for her dead body?"

"And her jewels," he added.

Margaret sank down in her chair again. "Tell me more," she said, "more of what you mean and in what part of the castle were her apartments—the room in which she disappeared?"

"Signora," he replied, "that would be telling you everything. If you will promise me to keep to yourself all I have just told you, help me in my search and guard me from your servants, and especially from the young Signore, who hates me—I swear to you that I will give you half the jewels, for I believe now that I can find them."

Margaret hesitated. Could this fantastic tale be true? He had told it in a perfectly straightforward way and in spite of its romantic, tragic and sensational qualities, she had to acknowledge that she believed it.

"Perhaps," he began, as her hesitancy continued, "the *gentilissima* thinks she can find the jewels by herself, but she is mistaken. To begin a search for a small pouch in any place as big as Rocca Serrata, without a clue would be a useless attempt, is it not so? The signora cannot get the jewels without my assistance and I cannot get them without her protection; what does the Signora say?"

Why should she not, she asked herself. Leone's dislike to the dwarf was purely superstitious and ridiculous. It would give her something to do, something to think of, some excitement in these tiresome winter days. And perhaps, perhaps they might really find the treasure, a pouch full of rubies and sapphires and diamonds!

"Say 'Yes,' Signora!"

"One moment, Ferruccio. Why are you so confident that you can find these jewels now, when you searched so carefully fifty years ago without success?"

"Because fifty years ago I was a stupid, ignorant lad; I

searched only with my eyes and hands, I did not search with my brains; is it 'Yes,' eh, Signora?"

"Yes," she said, "I will."

"Ah, thanks be to San Antonio! Many years have I prayed to him to let me see them again. We will find them, we will find them together!"

"It will soon be morning," Margaret said, feeling a shade of uneasiness creep over her. If Leone should find this out she dared not think of the consequences; but the secrecy and risk rather gave it more of a zest.

"You must hide somewhere, Ferruccio," she said, "and as early as I can I will bring you plenty to eat; where shall it be? I know — the chapel; no one ever goes near it; that's the safest place I can think of. Do you know how to get there?"

"Every step, Signora."

"Very well," and going over once more to the cabinet she said, "Here are candles and matches; I will make you more comfortable to-morrow. But you must be cautious; if you are found out, there will be awful trouble. Now I must go; don't drop wax or matches — our old steward has the eyes of a lynx; you go first."

## CHAPTER XXIII

### THE PASSAGE IN THE CRYPT

For many a month lost in snow profound,  
When Sol from Cancer sends the seasons bland,  
And in their northern cave the storms hath bound;  
From silent mountains, straight with startling sound,  
Torrents are hurled, green fields emerge,

And lo,  
The trees with foliage, cliffs with flowers are crowned.

BEATTIE.

When Leone awoke, his hand was very painful and needed attention, so it was late in the morning before Margaret could slip away to keep her tryst with the dwarf. She carried a basket of food, a bottle of the servants' wine, and a lantern, and hurried along through the freezing passages of the ground floor. She had not been to the chapel since the first summer when Fauvel had shown her over the castle; once she made a wrong turning but soon found her bearings and arrived at an arched door of worm-eaten oak studded with nails in the shape of a cross. It took both hands to open it. The chapel had long ago been rifled of all its sacred ornaments. There was a battered confessional in one corner, upon the altar some bits of broken tiles and rubbish, and a bent and tarnished candlestick. In a small gallery a primitive pipe organ was tumbling to pieces. Margaret closed the heavy door behind her. "Ferruccio," she called timidly, seeing no one; then a ragged purple curtain that screened off the sacristy was parted and the misshapen creature appeared.

"Ah, *Gentilissima*," he said, as he kissed the hem of her skirt, "I began to fear you would not come."

"I never break my promise, Ferruccio, but what we have undertaken is very dangerous. My husband and the servants think you have the 'Evil Eye,' and that you brought misfor-

tune to us by the death of our child, and you may be harshly dealt with if discovered. I will do my best to shield you, and this is the safest place I know of; my husband never comes near it, and the servants make a point of avoiding it, for they say it is unlucky to enter a desecrated chapel; for my part, I am not superstitious. Now eat," and she emptied the contents of the basket.

"Ah, *grazie*, Signora," the old man said, looking at the food with hungry eyes, "I will bring you good luck and fortune; only trust me."

"Where do you propose to begin the search?" she asked, after he had finished his meal and seemed much revived.

"Below in the vaults," he replied, pointing downward. "The apartments that Donna Lorina lived in are those nearest the ruins."

"Oh, that is far away from us," she said; "we live on the terrace — the villa side. What is your idea of going into the vaults?"

"Because, Signora, by doing that I can get right under the ruins and come up through them until I find myself on a level with the rear of the apartments of Donna Lorina, for I am convinced that the room in which she disappeared has some communication with them. Last summer when I made a pretext of digging for herbs I was really trying to discover some hole in the wall big enough for me to get through, so that I might come up inside the castle in that way."

"I suppose you know what you are about, Ferruccio," Margaret said; "it all sounds very vague to me, and remember the lady said the jewels were near cupids and dolphins; do you suppose she could have had reference to some picture or tapestry and have hidden them behind it?"

"That is a good idea, Signora; two heads are better than one. How often have I said to myself, 'Where Cupid guards and dolphins swim.'"

Margaret was thoughtful for a moment; then said: "I am

## *The Passage in the Crypt* 271

so afraid you will be seen, Ferruccio, if you go prowling around to find your way in the vaults."

"Perhaps I can go down from here, Signora." With that he went over to a slab in the floor and took hold of a large iron ring attached to it. He tried to pull it up, but strong as he was in the arms it would not move. He looked around, then picked up a bar of metal that had once been part of the chancel-rail, inserted it in the ring as a lever and the stone yielded. A horrible mouldy odor came up from the opening, which disclosed a stone stair.

"Be careful, Ferruccio," she cried, as he began to descend it. In a moment he was up again.

"It is a burial place," he said hoarsely; "the dead lie there."

The withered face showed all the Italian's instinctive horror of death. He reached for the flask of wine that was near and put it to his lips.

"Of course," said Margaret, "it is the crypt of the chapel. Now remember, Ferruccio, I have trusted you; play me no tricks."

"Some day when I put the jewels in the Signora's hands," he said, "she will know that poor Ferruccio speaks the truth. I will light the lantern and go down again and reconnoiter. This evening after dark I will step out by the covered stairway that leads from the sacristy to the ground and bring in my pick-ax and tools, which I hid under the vines against the wall last night. To-morrow when the Signora comes again I may have something to report; if not, the Signora can watch for an opportunity when it will be safe for us to go to the apartments of Donna Lorina."

"I do not know about that," Margaret said. "The last owner of the castle had many places walled up, but if you will say where these apartments are I might be able to tell you whether there is any communication with them."

"I will take you there, Signora," was all the reply he made. And Margaret went away saying to herself, "Ferruccio is a

shrewd one. He does not trust me as much as I trust him. There must be some truth in all this and yet I wonder if I am a raving fool to have taken a hand in it!"

Next morning when she visited him he told her he had found a door in the crypt opening into a gallery that probably led to the vaults; the other end of it seemed to be closed with fallen stones and mortar and it would be a work with his pickax to clear it away in order to pass further on, so he proposed that they go above and see how things looked there.

It was with a mixture of apprehension and repressed excitement that Margaret followed him, for Leone's hand being better, he had left his room, and she did not know where he had gone; but fortunately the dwarf took her through parts not frequented by the present household and finally after many turnings and stairs that were strange to her, they were abruptly stopped by a wall of new brick.

They looked aghast at one another; it would take workmen with tools to make an entrance.

"I was afraid we would find it so, Ferruccio," Margaret said disconsolately. "What can we do?"

"Wait, *gentilissima*," he replied, undaunted; "there is the front door in the small court. We have come by back corridors to avoid being seen, for the other way we must pass through the central hall."

But Margaret was afraid to attempt it until the daylight was dim, so they retraced their steps to meet again at sundown.

When the time came she left Leone dozing on the couch in the cedar room and tiptoed out until her footsteps were beyond hearing, when she began to run, making toward the keep and its great central hall. Crossing it, she moved stealthily in and out between the marble columns, looking for the dwarf in its dusky vastness. But Ferruccio was not there. Had he played her false? Had he made up this wonderful story as a ruse to be allowed to stay a night or so, and if there were anything of *value left* in the castle, had he got safely away with it?

## *The Passage in the Crypt* 273

While she stood there shivering from nervousness as well as from cold, she heard a sound like the click of a latch, and, looking in its direction, saw the dwarf.

"Where did you come from?" she asked, in consternation.

He showed her a clever door, frescoed over like the rest of the wall and of which she had not known the existence. It opened upon a narrow inside staircase, and though it aroused her curiosity there was no time now for investigation, and they cautiously proceeded. It was about the time when Clemente was likely to come with his torch to light the lamps in the living quarters and after they had passed certain frequented parts Margaret breathed more freely. They went up a broad stairway in the ghostly gloom and crossed a covered gallery that looked down into a small inner court between the main building and the north wing, to a door trimmed with metal and a knocker that had a familiar aspect. A satisfied smile was upon the old man's face, as he easily pushed it open and took her hand to guide her down two or three steps. As he struck a match she had the sense of having been in the place before, and as the flame touched the candle the light struck upon a suit of ancient armor, standing upright beside a long carved chest. She gave a gasp. It was here that she and Leone had come one summer day and hidden the habit of a Franciscan monk, and that figure of ancient armor was guarding the secret of her life and his, as well as the secret of Donna Lorina.

"This, Signora," said the dwarf, rapping the door he was closing behind them, "is the front door to these apartments which make almost a small castle within a castle."

But Margaret did not answer. She was looking at the chest and at the grim armor as if beseeching it to tell no tales.

"Now we shall see," Ferruccio continued, lifting a panel of moth-eaten tapestry opposite, that covered another door, but all efforts to open this one were vain. Striking it with his heavy fists, they could tell by the sound that it was securely barred from behind and Margaret guessed that Fauvel's artistic eye

had not wished to spoil the effect of this antechamber of the condemned apartments by another wall of ugly brick, so had hung the tapestry over the chief entrance, closing them from the other side.

"Well," said Ferruccio, desisting at length, "there is nothing to do now but clear the gallery from the crypt. There is a passage that comes up from the vaults into this part of the house. I know it well; many a time have I gone down that way for firewood."

"My husband and the *padrone* sometimes go down into the vaults," Margaret began; "I once saw the *padrone* with a big key which he told me belonged to an iron door that went down into the vaults, so there must be another way."

"There is, Signora, from a sort of cellar back of the kitchen and storehouse, but your servants would see us even if we could get the key. I know that door was always kept locked, for I tried it twice last summer after dark when there was no one around, but now it is winter and the servants stay indoors. No, the only thing to do is to clear the gallery, come up from there and make my soundings in the room in which Donna Lorina disappeared."

But the work of clearing that passage from the crypt was a longer and more difficult task than Ferruccio had anticipated, and each day when Margaret visited him, bringing him food and oil for his lantern, he reported but slow progress.

"You may be killed, Ferruccio," she said, "down there all alone;" but he replied that he was very careful. "And, Signora," he added, "Donna Lorina's star of diamonds, her most glorious jewel, shines to guide me. All the years of my wanderings I have seen that star shining, seen it in my dreams; it has led me through many countries and many years, back, back to old Rocca, and I know that I shall see it again before I die."

When Margaret had almost lost interest and hope, the whole *thing* was such a doubtful story, there was Ferruccio still going

down regularly past the niches where the dead lay, and willing to risk his life. Yes, there must be some truth in it, and it made her very thoughtful, so that Leone would often say, "Come back to earth, Margherita. Of what dost thou think? Silent so long!" And once when he insisted upon knowing her thoughts, she replied, "Perhaps I am mentally composing a novel, which some day I may write."

"Am I in it?" he asked.

"Yes," she answered, "all of us. It will be about Rocca Serrata, but we shall all have different names, of course, and perhaps I shall make more money with my prose than you can with your poetry."

Leone's hand was well enough for him to amuse himself with a game of "solitaire" as he talked.

"You must have a villain in it, you know," he went on, "to make it a good seller, a real bad one. I'll fix him for you; we'll write him up to resemble that hideous one, the dwarf. He has not shown himself around here for many a day; he knows better."

At that moment a rumbling sound was heard below.

"*Diavolo!*" he exclaimed, starting from his seat. "What is that?"

Margaret turned cold. Was it Ferruccio at work?

Clemente happened to be in the room at the time and was called upon for an explanation.

"I have heard that noise several times lately, Signore, and the only way I can account for it is that the workmen in the quarry, at the back of the great rock, sometimes use a blast which strikes a vein in the mountain that carries the sound along for a good distance."

Margaret shuddered. Had Ferruccio been hurt, she wondered. Perhaps he had reached the end of the passage and the sound of the final blows of his pick had rolled through the opening, echoing along the vaults.

Leone seemed satisfied with what Clemente had said and

continued his game; but Margaret could hardly sleep that night from her apprehension for Ferruccio — suppose he had been injured or killed in the passage! As she drew near the chapel next morning she was almost afraid to open the door; but there he was, shaking in a corner on his mattress which she had managed to have him get, his face bright, but looking pale and ill.

"I have come to the end, Signora," he cried cheerfully; "last night. The way is now clear to the vaults. We can go up at any time right into the closed apartments, unless I am very much mistaken. But, Signora," he added, "I am ill. Ever since I crawled back here I feel as if I could never move again. All night I have frozen with chills," and he began to shake.

"It is malaria," she said, "from working underground and sleeping in this damp place. I will bring you some quinine and strong red wine and to-morrow we must find a safe room for you upstairs."

But on the morrow Ferruccio was too ill to move. Margaret began to be alarmed. She dared not tell of his being there; the servants would not tolerate him any more than would Leone, and she was afraid he might die on her hands. He was so docile, so respectful and gentle that she had begun to have a pitying affection for him, as one has for a faithful dog. She realized that he must have a fire. She spied an old bronze brazier in the sacristy that it took all her strength to drag out, and then she purloined from Clemente's stores a sack of charcoal which she pulled after her down all the length of long corridors with the utmost difficulty, and the poor sick creature smiled contentedly when he saw the ruddy light and felt the warmth, as she sat down beside the battered brazier and fanned the lighted coals into life, and heated broth which she held to his lips.

"I think you are an angel come down from heaven," he would say when she waited upon him, and his faded eyes spoke the gratitude he could not express.

## *The Passage in the Crypt* 277

"Ah! I will bless the day when I put the jewels into the Signora's beautiful hands that she has soiled for a poor outcast like me. She will go straight to heaven when she dies, she is an angel."

And Margaret would say, "Don't, Ferruccio; I am far from being an angel. Pray for me; don't praise me."

She lived in such constant anxiety for fear of being detected and of having him die and the secret of the jewels die with him that she became restless and irritable under the strain. If Leone were only sensible, she would confide in him, but she dared not, knowing his disposition. Oh, if Fauvel were here she would go boldly and trust him with the great secret, and he would come and prescribe for poor Ferruccio and counsel and advise.

"Where do you go, Margherita?" Leone said sometimes. "Often I want you and I call. I look for you, but I cannot find you. I ask the servants, 'Where is the Signora?' '*Chi lo sa,*' they make answer; 'who knows?' not they. What are you about, going off by yourself?"

And on these days Margaret would not dare to make her visits until he had gone out. Then she would steal off to the central hall, where she had learned to use the clever door, disappear into the frescoed wall, run up the interior stair to the top floor of the Keep, cross the length of the house in safety, and come down another stair not far from the chapel. She also made a systematic search in every place that was open to her for some picture, tapestry, or carving that might have for its subject cupids and dolphins. Again, at dusk, she would wander off to that part of the castle where Ferruccio had first taken her and stand face to face with the wall of new bricks and wonder if really and actually it were all that stood between her and the dazzling treasure in which the poor, simple, old man believed so firmly. Sometimes she would lose herself in her haste to get back to Leone, for the corridors were all so alike, and how glad she would be at last to see the familiar Signs of

the Zodiac leading to her own apartments, and a glimmer of light far down the long perspective.

She became so engrossed with all this, and the care of her patient, preparing his food when Lisa was away from the kitchen, reading his symptoms in Fauvel's medical books, dodging Leone and the servants in her visits to and from the chapel that time no longer hung heavily on her hands, and she scarcely noticed that here and there hilltops had thrown off their winter covering, that the big snow image made by Beppo and Leone in the courtyard had almost melted, and was surprised when the latter announced that the ice had broken up in the river, and the flamingoes were flying northward.

There was one patch of snow on a certain part of the towering rock overshadowing the castle that was always the last to go, and one morning as Margaret awoke and looked from her window the white patch was gone, the sky a brighter blue, the air warmer, trees and shrubs had put forth green leaves, the long, dreadful winter was over.

The spring brought back Carlotta looking prettier than ever with her wealth of red-gold hair, arranged in the latest style, and her smart gowns. Margaret did not encourage her visits as formerly. It was hard enough to manage her interviews with Ferruccio, and to have another person to consider would complicate matters still more. Very soon now he would be strong enough to continue the search, for he was improving every day.

Carlotta talked a great deal about herself, her success, and admirers, and boasted of the invitations she had received for the summer.

"You were very foolish," Margaret said, "not to accept them. Why should you want to bury yourself here, I cannot understand. With your looks and voice and opportunities you ought to be — well, 'making hay while the sun shines.'"

"You live here, Signora," the girl answered.

"It is different with me," Margaret replied. "This is my home and I have ties."

"Perhaps I too have ties, Signora," and Carlotta sighed a little affectedly. "Papa is growing old."

Margaret had never remarked any special filial devotion in the girl, who went on in a rather injured tone, "I thought you would be glad to have me come back; you used to say it was horribly dull, particularly when the Signor Artista is away."

"Yes, it is duller than ever when Fauvel is not here," Margaret answered innocently, "and I am glad to see you, my dear. I was only thinking of your interests. You ought to make a good match."

"Oh, I do not think about marriage," she replied. "I have my art" (an expression learned from Fauvel). However, down in her secret soul it was a mortification to her that she was not married. For an Italian girl to be in her twenty-fifth year and unmarried was a dreadful state of affairs. There were plenty of men in her own walk of life who would have given their right eyes to be the husband of Santoni's beautiful daughter, but she spurned them scornfully. She was attractive enough to marry a gentleman at least, if not a nobleman. Other lovely singers of obscure birth made fine matches, then why not she?

Until she had met Belmonte these had been her sentiments, but since then all was changed. All could go — art, ambition, pride — for that starry-eyed Adonis who lived in a tumble-down rookery near her native village, where things were at least five hundred years behind the times. Alas! Adonis was married and absurdly faithful; but while there is life there is hope, and she continued to wonder how he could think twice between her blonde beauty and the dark-haired American with her school-girl face and figure.

"I've seen him, I'm sure I've seen him," Leone cried, running down into the garden to where Margaret and Carlotta were talking.

"Who, who?" they both exclaimed.

The *jettatura*, the Italian name for a creature cursed and cursing with the Evil Eye, is untranslatable, because we need no such noun; Leone declared now that he had seen the "*jettatura*."

"I had gone," said he, "into the studio for some chalk, and happened to look from a window, and I was sure I saw him with his back against a big stone. I tore downstairs and out there, but he had gone. I could swear it was he, but where could he go so quickly? If he takes to coming round here again I'll smash his head — I'll kill him!"

"Hush — Hush!" said Margaret, trembling inwardly. "What foolish, extravagant talk. You don't mean that."

"I do," he declared. "Is it not enough, the dire tragedy he brought us before, without risking any of his black magic again? I'll kill him dead."

"Signor Belmonte is right," said Carlotta; "the dwarf is a thing of evil."

"I cannot understand," Margaret said, "this insane hatred of a poor, deformed creature. It's purely your imagination; in reality, he has done nothing. He only digs for worthless weeds that we do not want."

"He has been forbidden to come here, you know it, Margherita," said Leone.

"Yes, I know, but how many of us do things that we are forbidden to do — all our lives." With that she turned away and went toward the house, leaving Carlotta and Leone together.

Of course it was Ferruccio, who had stolen out to get the warmth of the spring sunshine through his frozen bones; it did him more good than anything else, these morning airings, and they had thought it quite safe for him to do so. He sat on a rock in the sun over by the ruins, where nobody went for months at a time and none of their windows looked out upon it. What perverse fate could have taken Leone over to the

## *The Passage in the Crypt* 281

closed studio? Well, she must tell Ferruccio to be more cautious — poor old man!

"The signora is not *simpatica*," remarked Carlotta, when Margaret was gone. "It is hard for a man when his wife goes against him."

"The Signora is American, she does not understand," he answered curtly.

"I wonder do all American women treat their husbands as she treats hers?"

"What do you mean?"

"She snubs you so, Signore, and criticizes you. The man knows best what he is talking about — *non è ver?* You are a man, not a child; she should obey you and respect you."

"She is all right, the Signora," Leone said quickly. "She is only an American and she cannot help that, and it is not becoming in you her guest, to criticize her."

"Forgive me, Signore," Carlotta said meekly. "I am only the daughter of an innkeeper and she is *aristocratica*, but I cannot help seeing things."

"What things?"

The two were seated on some steps at the further end of the garden. Leone dug his heel into the soft sod. "What things?" Still no answer. He turned and faced her, and the blue eyes met the brown. She was looking particularly pretty then, in a charming gown which had an air about it that Margaret in her old-style shirt-waist and skirt envied. Carlotta's complexion was pink and white and the sun shone on her glorious hair, turning it to a fiery gold. For the first time Leone thought her beautiful, saw her as Fauvel had seen her from an artistic standpoint, and she caught the glance of admiration in his eyes. The soft April breeze blew around them, bringing whiffs of fresh earth and early blossoms; spring and love were in the air. Suddenly she threw her arms about his neck and whispered:

"Kiss me, *bel Leone*."

He drew back, surprised and utterly shocked.

"Signorina, you forget yourself," he said.

"I do not, nor you either — have you no wish for love?"

"I love only the Signora Margherita, my precious wife," he said soberly.

Carlotta gave a mocking laugh.

"She does not love you."

"What do you mean?" he asked harshly.

"I told you I could not help seeing many things, and I think you are blind or stupid not to see them yourself. Do you not hear her say so often how dull it is without Signor Fauvel?"

"And I say so, too. No one is better company than he."

"So she thinks, and is it not strange when they are together they speak almost always in French, which neither you nor I understand?"

"It is his native language —"

"Ah! — but it is not hers."

"Whatever the Signora says in any language is sure to be right," Leone said coldly.

"You think so; that is well. Have you ever noticed when Signor Fauvel is at home how he makes pencil sketches of her all the time? He would paint you and me for the public eye, but the sketches of the Signora he keeps for himself."

"Nonsense!" Leone exclaimed, rising as if tired of the conversation; "if my uncle wants to sketch my wife because she is pretty and graceful, he is welcome to; and it is very bad form in you to eat his bread and sleep under his roof and yet talk against him and a lady who is gracious enough to receive you as a friend."

"Stop, stop, Signore Leone!" for he was walking away; she rose also. She had one more thrust: "Perhaps you do not know that when the baby died after you had been drugged to make you sleep, he spent the night in her room."

Leone turned on her furiously: "How dare you speak such lies! The Signora is above reproach, also Fauvel. I would

trust them together to the ends of the earth. But I have heard tales of you, Carlotta Santi. It is said in the village that sometimes when the hunting parties of fine gentlemen stop at her father's home the handsome daughter entertains them if the consideration is high enough, and hoodwinks her respected father, who thinks her a good girl. I told this to the Signora Margherita, but she would not believe it. And yet you would defame her — how dare you!" And he seized her by the shoulders and shook her until her teeth chattered. "How dare you," he repeated, "you common peasant, you jackdaw in peacock's plumes, you meddling minx! Be off from here and never come back!" With that he loosed his hold and sent her starting forward.

"Ough!" she screamed, in a passion of rage. "How dare you touch me! Also I hear things said of you. You are not really the nephew of Fauvel; nobody knows who you are — his bastard, perhaps. Oh, but you shall smart for this, Leone Belmonte! May you die of apoplexy, may your little dead come back to torture you! I'll be revenged, wait and see, you virtuous fool, you handsome simpleton, you —" but the last epithet was lost upon him, for he had gone and Carlotta took herself off, her blood boiling with anger, a desperate look in her blue eyes and vengeance in her heart.

When Leone entered the house he was stopped by Beppo, who had been to the village for the mail. There was one letter for Margaret and one for himself from Fauvel which said "*urgente*" in the corner, so he sat down and opened it immediately. Presently Margaret came in and took up hers.

"I ought to have heard from home by this mail, but here's next best, from dear Giacinta."

It was a short letter, which she quickly finished, but Leone was still poring over his.

"What is it," she asked; "anything wrong with Meurice?"

"No," he answered slowly, without looking up, "only he wants me to go away for two or three days. He is preparing

for his lectures on 'Archaic Art in Ancient Towns,' and wants me to go to these places and look up matters he has listed down here and write him information — mostly dates. For some of them I will have to get *permissi* \* from the authorities. Ah! *Dio mio*, I do not want to go. It means leaving thee, Margherita, for three days, three whole days and nights. I have never left thee alone before, *tesoro mio*."

Here was the opportunity Margaret had been waiting for to make the great search.

"When does he want you to go?" she asked.

"At once. I will start early to-morrow. I must send the horses to be shod to-day."

Early the next morning Leone stood impatiently waiting for Beppo to bring round the horses and summon him. He was always ready ahead of time, for his monastic training had made him very prompt.

He and Margaret were in the cedar room together; she held an ancient-style storm coat that she insisted upon his taking, as the weather was still cold towards nightfall, and was telling him not to worry about her.

"But I shall worry, *carissima*; if there were only railroads and comforts for women, I might take thee. I hate to leave thee with no one to speak to but servants —"

"Nonsense, nonsense, Leonino! Here's Beppo," as the boy appeared in the doorway.

"*Amore mio*," Leone whispered, taking her in his arms, "I feel that I do wrong to leave thee here alone. For no one else in the world but Fauvel would I do so."

"Dearest, I am not one bit afraid, and I will have Lisa sleep in my room. I will find plenty to do," she said, and she followed him to the gates.

"*A rivederci, Amore*," he called out, as he turned in his saddle to throw her one last kiss, and she waved to him, smiling. How splendidly he rode, she thought, and how handsome

\* *Permits*.

## *The Passage in the Crypt* 285

he looked in his tan corduroy and high riding boots! Then she turned and went indoors, and the old house seemed strangely desolate.

She ran to the tower, up and up until she reached the top and saw him cantering away in the spring sunshine with Beppo at a respectful distance behind, and watched him until he was out of sight, as Donna Lorina had watched her lover fifty years before.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### "WHERE CUPID GUARDS AND DOLPHINS SWIM"

All is dead here  
Joy has fled here  
Let us hence, 'tis the end of all  
The gray arch crumbles  
And totters, and tumbles,  
And silence sits in the banquet hall.

T B. ALDRICH.

"It had better be to-day, Signora. The young Signore might return unexpectedly, eh? And then our search would be postponed again," so said Ferruccio a little later when Margaret had gone to the chapel to report that the "coast was clear" at last and that she was free to leave her apartments as long as she chose without fear of being watched or questioned.

"We must have a lantern apiece," Ferruccio continued, "and it would be best for the Signora to wear something old that she does not fear to spoil."

"I do not think I could do much damage to any of my clothes," Margaret answered a little plaintively, thinking of her now scanty wardrobe, "but I have a short skirt I could put on. I will be back here in half an hour," and she hastened away. She felt herself almost lifted off her feet with the nervous excitement of exhilaration and covered the space quickly between the chapel and her rooms where she found Lisa putting things to rights.

"You may bring my luncheon up here," she said to the woman, "it is too lonely to eat by myself downstairs." The truth was, she was under too tense a sense of something impending to want to be alone.

"Signora," said Ferruccio, when she was again in the chapel, "while you were gone I went out to get the sun through me and see what I found," handing her an unopened letter.

It was directed to herself and from her sister Josephine, the letter she had been expecting with the other mail yesterday. Beppo must have dropped and lost it. How disgracefully careless of him! She tucked it inside her waist; the home news that she was usually so eager for could wait now. She looked like a *vivandière* with her short skirt and high boots, a sort of old knapsack in which she carried a few tools slung over her shoulder; and Ferruccio with his pickax, his short, misshapen body and long, scraggy beard, suggested a hobgoblin from a child's picture book.

He raised the slab that covered the entrance to the crypt and taking up his lantern began to descend. Margaret stood at the top of the steps looking down into the darkness; now that the moment had actually come, her courage failed.

“Do not be afraid of the dead, Signora,” Ferruccio said, seeing her hesitate. “These are good dead; they are quiet. All the weeks I have lived here they have never disturbed me; their souls are at rest.”

“I am not afraid of the dead,” Margaret replied, and picking up her lantern, followed him.

The crypt was like many another she had seen in Italy, a stone altar at one end corresponding to the altar above, and tombs in the walls and floor, but what attracted her attention was a crude pine coffin. From some feeling of morbid curiosity she went close to it and holding up the lantern saw there was one word painted on it — she knew that style of lettering — it was Fauvel's.

“Come back,” she cried to Ferruccio, who was going on to the opening of the passage, “look, look here!”

“What is it, Signora?”

“This name, this one word — ‘Lorina’?”

“What!” he exclaimed.

“Do you mean to say you have passed here all these times and never noticed this?” Margaret said excitedly; “here is the grave of Donna Lorina. Look, read for yourself!”

"Alas, Signora, I cannot read —"

"Some one has found her body and buried it here —"

"May God rest her soul!" he said, and dropped upon his knees.

"I do not think it is worth while to go on," Margaret said dejectedly. "This lettering does not appear to be more than a few years old. The person who found her body found her jewels; it is useless to go further."

"No, no, Signora," cried the old man, rising; "this may be her body, but the jewels she hid — Count Steno never found them, that I know. Last night I dreamed again of the diamond star, it was brighter than ever, now blue — red — green — then a dazzling white. It led me down here through the vaults up to where I last saw her, then into the ruins and there stopped; but it did not vanish and I woke to find one big star shining through my window. And I promised the Blessed Mother that if I ever got back to Rocca Serrata, and found the jewels, I would have that star set in a crown and placed upon her head at one of her shrines in some church. If I close my eyes I can see it now — it shines, it sparkles, it points — Our Lady wants that star and she will help us. Come, Signora *Gentilissima*, come."

Margaret reflected. Because some one had found the opening from Donna Lorina's room, it did not of course follow that they had found anything else, so she said, "Very well," and walked with him toward the passage; but all the zest of the undertaking had gone, workmen had been at the castle tearing down and walling up; and nine chances to ten they had found the jewels and said nothing.

The passage was narrow, uneven and low; it must have been choked up for centuries, she thought, and walking over débris was difficult; but when she came out of it she felt hard, level ground under her feet and looking up saw she was in the great vaults of Rocca Serrata. "Oh, how magnificent!" she cried. *Immense*, ponderous arches rolled on and on one after another

into obscurity, rounding from the mighty walls as if upholding the weight of the world. But Ferruccio was disappearing in the darkness ahead of her, she could only see his lantern, so she hurried after him. They passed a flight of stairs cut out of solid rock, leading down into inky blackness. "Where does that go?" she asked.

"To the dungeons," he replied, stooping and picking up something, and she saw it was a torch, which he proceeded to light, giving her the other lantern.

On they went through an endless succession of arches, the flaring torch showing the wonder and symmetry of the architecture. Then they came to a wall that apparently divided the structure; it had one arched opening through which they passed into another portion of the building and she was surprised to find the daylight coming in through dug-out windows strongly barred, and then she remembered that the rock upon which the castle stood sloped decidedly on the north and what would be the ground floor on her side of the house would be the third story here. As they proceeded a horrible thought struck her: suppose anything were to happen to Ferruccio, she would be lost. When Leone returned he would look for her everywhere else before thinking of coming down here. The oil in her lanterns would only last a few hours, and then — she blew out one of them. Why had she not left a note giving an idea of where she had gone; or at least she might have brought white beans like "Hop o' my Thumb" to drop as she went. Just as terror was getting the upper hand, Ferruccio opened a small door of grated iron and she saw a spiral passageway winding up around a great circular pillar of masonry. It had a cement floor and walls, with now and then a slit for a window. Ferruccio extinguished his torch and entered. They wound round it, going higher until it brought them at last into a white-washed space flooded with sunshine, and she could look down upon the castellated roof of a lower part where rusty cannon pointed out threateningly. Then Ferruccio opened another door and she

found herself amidst melancholy remnants of departed grandeur. These apartments showed the havoc that had been wrought by the rifling of their rich decorations. Carvings had been wrenched from cornices, fixtures of hanging lamps were broken away, and one could see where tapestries had been literally cut from the panels. Dust lay thick upon everything, and a mournful silence reigned.

"Ah, *Madre di Dio*," sighed Ferruccio, as he gazed about sadly, "how changed, how changed!"

There was no furniture; it had either been moved to the more modern parts of the house or taken away altogether. As they came to a stair Ferruccio paused. "How many times at night," he said, half to himself, "have I stood here listening to the drunken carousals of Count Steno and his friends in the hall below!" Next he showed her a large sort of living room with a dark ceiling of carved cypress wood that had partly fallen and what was left seemed likely to fall at any moment; opposite was a door with heavy iron bars across it.

"Can you guess where that leads to, Signora?" he asked, pointing to it.

"No," answered Margaret.

Very cautiously he stepped over the floor, she following, fearful lest the timbers should come down upon their heads. Ferruccio removed the bars and opening the door, lifted a curtain weighted at the bottom and let her look out.

"Oh," she exclaimed, "is this what lies beyond! How many times have I stood in there and longed and longed to be on this side."

She was peering into the well-known antechamber. There was the suit of ancient armor and there was the old chest, and hidden in it a monk's habit.

"How much time and trouble we might have saved if we could have gotten in this way," she said. Now she saw for herself why Fauvel had cut off communication. Time had

been disastrously at work in the half century since the tragic end of Donna Lorina.

Ferruccio reclosed and barred the door, and Margaret noticed, as they tiptoed back over the floor so as not to jar the ceiling, that there were ashes in the fireplace; no one had taken the trouble to clean it since the last person had warmed himself there. After going through the other rooms — empty, funereal and dismantled — he stopped. "Here," he said, "is where my lady disappeared."

Margaret looked around. This room, as Ferruccio had said, had but one door. It contained a common table, a three-legged stool, and an old-fashioned wicker bird cage. The floor was of brick, the woodwork ordinary, and the walls and ceiling of rough plaster. From the windows she could see below the adjoining ruins, roofless in parts and overgrown with vines. She perched herself upon the table and motioned Ferruccio to be seated on the stool, that they might rest while consulting.

"What was this used for in your day?" was her first question.

"As a sort of catch-all, Signora; you see it is not handsome like the others."

"And that?" she added, pointing to an enormous wardrobe set in the wall; "it looks big enough to keep house in."

"The clothing of Donna Lorina was kept there," he replied.

"Then," said Margaret, "Donna Lorina must have gone away through it."

"But, Signora, it cannot be moved, it is a part of the house."

"I see that, but there must be some secret door inside, there must be."

"I looked inside over and over and could find nothing. At first, naturally I supposed she was hiding there."

Then Margaret made him tell her again the story of the mad flight through the rooms.

"And you never thought of a secret exit?" she asked. "Look at the thickness of those walls!"

"I was young and ignorant, Signora. I had never heard of such things. I thought only of what I could see."

"Open it."

He rose and obeyed. The cabinet was perhaps four feet deep, ten feet long and quite high. It was empty, half of it having wooden pegs to hold clothing, like an ordinary closet. Margaret jumped down from the table and came over to inspect. Outside it was of paneled chestnut, but inside of rough boards. She took a hammer from her knapsack and handed it to Ferruccio. He began to make soundings with it.

"There is nothing here," he said; "hark," knocking again, "it is solid wall."

Margaret stepped inside, throwing both doors wide open and examining it thoroughly. There was no sign of "trap-door" in the floor, but on the end opposite the pegs, where the closet was fitted into the wall, the boards were smaller and divided into upper and lower parts with a ledge of wood like a frame.

"Strike there," she said.

Ferruccio struck a blow. The sound came back hollow. They looked at each other; he struck again. There was no mistake, it was hollow behind the boarding. The perspiration broke out upon the dwarf's forehead.

"It is here," Margaret cried. "If necessary, we must beat the boards down, we can fix them up afterwards; but there must be a spring, a catch—" With trembling hands she felt along all four sides of the framework; she was just able to reach the top but could detect nothing.

"Wait, though, does this mean anything?" and she touched a large knot in the rough wood near the frame that stood out prominently; "wait," she added excitedly, "I think I feel it move, but I have not strength enough; you try, Ferruccio."

He put his large thumb upon the knot and the boarding suddenly flew back from the framework—it was a spring door.

Margaret gasped. "Here, here," she exclaimed. "Oh,

you stupid fellow, to have searched three days and never to have thought of this!"

Ferruccio was passing his hand over his eyes, dumbfounded. Margaret pushed the door far back and disclosed steps descending. She could only see the first three or four, after that all was darkness.

Here was great evidence to the truth of Ferruccio's story. At the bottom of the steps she already saw the jewels waiting for her, she had only to go down and pick them up. But with the birth of the hope, doubt again assailed her; some one else had been here before them and had found the body and the jewels as well.

Ferruccio had recovered his self-possession and had brought the lanterns and the torch and was preparing to descend. But Margaret held back. The crypt and the vaults were "scary" enough, but this dense thick blackness was terrible! This narrow rough stair leading they knew not where; perhaps to some horrible "oubliette" which would give way with them and send them down to a frightful death; to say nothing of deliberately entering a part of the castle that was known to be unsafe — oh, she could not!

"Are you coming, Signora?" Ferruccio asked. He had gone down several steps and was waiting for her.

"It is so dark," she faltered.

"We must go on, though," he said, "to find where 'Cupid guards.' It is not dark to me, for I see the star shining."

"He has lost his mind, too," Margaret said to herself, "poor old thing! O Leone, O Fauvel, suppose I never come back!"

Then she followed him fearfully, feeling the way with her hand down the rough sides. It was stifling, she could scarcely breathe; but the darkness only lasted for a space, then the stair turned a sharp angle and she saw faint daylight; they had descended into a small chamber concealed within the thickness of the walls, which measured here probably eighteen feet. A ray of sunshine was coming in from a narrow shaftlike opening in

the ceiling, which was of stone like the floor and the walls, giving just enough light and air to make the place habitable. It took only a moment to see that they must go still further on in their search; no cupids, no dolphins, no ornamentation of any kind, were visible. There was only a half burnt candle, its dripping wax hardened in a metal candlestick, a withered apple dried like a mummy, a stone seat against the wall, and on the floor a heap of straw.

Had some one once lived in this cell, Margaret thought, and for what motive had it been built and was it where Donna Lorina had died? She believed Ferruccio must be thinking the same, for he was looking around as if for some trace of the lost lady and shook his head dolefully.

"Oh, dear," Margaret sighed listlessly, "I'm sure we will never find them."

"*Coraggio*, Signora; shall we go on?"

"Very well," she said indifferently, and taking up their lanterns Ferruccio opened a narrow oak door which was just wide enough for one to pass through at a time and they saw another flight of steps going still downwards; descending, they came to a zigzag passage densely black and close.

Margaret began to be thoroughly alarmed. Had they lost their way?—they had made so many turnings! Suppose the lanterns were to go out; oh, why, why had she come! "Where are we, Ferruccio?" she demanded.

"In the ruins; cannot the Signora tell that we are winding between walls?"

"We are risking our lives then. The *padrone* has forbidden any one to go into the ruins unless he takes them. Let us go back; I am frightened."

The air was hot and suffocating. She could scarcely breathe, and her eyes seemed strained out of their sockets as she groped her way after him.

"No woman would ever venture into a hole like this to hide a bag of jewels," she added irritably.

"Donna Lorina was not a sane woman," he made answer gently. "Come, Signora," and he took her hand and held his lantern out ahead of them. "Here is another stair; when we have come to the bottom of it we will be on the ground floor."

Margaret allowed herself to be half led, half dragged along; a faintness and nausea stole over her. This was how Donna Lorina had died, tangled up in the horrible labyrinth!

They had reached the stair. Taking a semi-circular curve like a corkscrew, it showed that they were in a round tower and it brought them down to a landing before the rough inner side of a door.

"How is this?" said Ferruccio, peering with his lantern for a latch, a key, or some way of opening it; then near the bottom they found a clumsy knob.

"Push it up," said Margaret; "it is a slide."

Sure enough, with a creaking noise the door slid upward and they saw a peculiar octagonal-shaped room in the base of the ruined north tower.

Margaret gave a sigh of intense relief as they stepped out. Oh, how good the daylight, and the fresh cool air!

She looked about, drawing in several deep breaths. There was nothing encouraging to their quest here. The tower butted into a small yard, enclosed by a high wall, and the room in which they found themselves was formed of oak paneling with heavy ornamental clappings of metal, each panel made to resemble a door. Two of them were actually doors, and she thought the person who had put the new lock upon the one toward the yard might have spared himself the trouble, for the wall there in spite of its thickness had crumbled away from the slit window above the paneling, leaving an open space and any agile person might easily climb inside. The opposite door had fallen from its age-worn hinges and was lying upon the ground; through it they caught a glimpse of the interior of the ruins, a mournful sight.

Margaret's hope was almost extinguished as she took in the

unfavorable surroundings, but she was thankful beyond words to get out of that horrible passage alive and unhurt.

"Let us pull down this slide," she suggested, as nothing else presented itself; "perhaps it may be painted with the device we are searching for"; but when adjusted it proved to be a panel exactly like the others, completing the eighth side of the room.

"What now?" she asked, looking about disconsolately.

The dwarf closed his eyes and thought, scratching his head.

She could not doubt the story of Donna Lorina since she had seen her coffin, but as for the jewels, they were an hallucination of the old man's brain. "He is half cracked," she said to herself, watching him.

His lips were moving as if in prayer, otherwise he was perfectly quiet. Margaret became impatient. "What now, Ferruccio?"

He opened his eyes. "We must get out there," he said, pointing to the yard. "I cannot seem to see the star anywhere else. Can you climb, Signora?"

"Yes, indeed," she would go to the bitter end now, though she expected nothing.

A portion of the wall had fallen inside, by which they climbed to the hole that had once been a window. Ferruccio went first, as usual, up the pile of debris, passed through and stood a little below on another heap. He held out his arms. "Jump, signora!" She did so. Oh, thank God, she now felt safer! The yard was out of doors and though there might still be danger from tottering walls, there was no ceiling or floor to give way. But what a fool she had been! What delusion! Here they were at the end of their journey, in an overgrown yard with yawning holes in the high enclosure. Wild cucumber, henbane, nettles and "Christ thorn" clung to its mouldering stones and from somewhere she heard a bird twittering; everything else was dead, dank, rotting! She was tired out *and* disgusted with herself. It served her right, she thought, to

have been taken in by a peasant's tale. She felt sorry, however, for the old dwarf.

"Oh, my poor Ferruccio," she began, then stopped short.

What was he doing over there, pushing the tangled vines away from the wall? It was an old dry fountain he had uncovered. The figures above the basin were so weather-beaten, scarred and chipped that they looked to be little more than an unrecognizable heap.

She came nearer. What was there about it that so interested him; had he lost his senses entirely? "'Where Cupid guards and dolphins swim,'" she heard him mutter.

"What!" she cried. "What?"

He was not mistaken. There in the ancient fountain a cupid astride a dolphin could with difficulty be discerned, to such an extent had the wear and tear of centuries marred the sculpture.

"Where Cupid guards and dolphins swim," he repeated, looking at her.

"Yes," she said very slowly, using great self-control. She would not allow herself to hope even now. "Yes, cupid and the dolphins are here, but where are the jewels? Gone, gone, long ago."

"Not so, Signora; they are here. I will find them if I dig to the foundations of old Rocca," and he began to pull furiously at the tangled weeds that grew up between the cracks in the basin.

"Wait," she said, struck with a sudden idea. "Wait, Ferruccio—"

The mouth of the dolphin was open and large, for in olden times a stream of water had flowed from it. She put her hand inside the fish's mouth and drew it out again, turning very white.

"I felt something," she almost whispered in suppressed excitement; then in a firmer voice, "but probably some substance had blown in there."

"Feel again, Signora, your little hand can get in further than

my big one, pull it out," and he pushed her trembling arm toward it once more.

Again she inserted her hand and drew out a dirty, damp object which the dwarf snatched from her with a loud, exultant cry, kissing it and pressing it to his heart. "San Antonio be praised! San Antonio, the helper of all who seek what they have lost. It is my old pouch, Signora, the same, the same that I put the jewels into fifty years ago!"

Then he threw up his cap like a boy of ten, and spun round and round the yard in a wild, triumphant whirl, uttering gleeful, incoherent sounds and calling benedictions on all the saints. But as his excitement increased Margaret became calmer. She would not be deluded. She was prepared for disappointment.

"Your pouch, yes," she said, "but full of stones."

"Precious stones; look, Signora!" He knelt down upon a remnant of pavement and unfastened the pouch. Margaret closed her eyes. She heard a tinkling noise and Ferruccio exclaimed: "Look; ah, look!"

Despite the dust of ages, there was a glitter and sparkle in the mass that met her sight. A gasp of wonder and joy escaped her lips. She dropped on her knees beside him; here before her shining like Truth was the lost treasure!

She made an effort to speak, but was dumb; she did not know whether she were going to faint from sheer delight, but she mastered herself and was able to form two words: "Oh, Ferruccio!"

"Look at them, touch them, Signora; they are ours, all ours."

She took up a heart of diamonds with a ruby in the center like a drop of blood, a half moon, a lyre, rings, brooches, chains of massive gold, and last of all the famous guiding star, large, sharp-pointed and still glistening enough to catch the rays of the sun, now in the meridian.

"Let us put them back," he said, glancing around furtively, "when we are once more in the chapel we will divide them."

Ah, Signora, did I not say this should be the luckiest day of your life! And now you will believe I am not the 'evil eye,' just a poor old man who came to find what was his own."

"My good honest Ferruccio," Margaret said, as they picked up the jewels, admiring them one by one and dropping them again into the pouch, "you must never go away from here; you shall live in a comfortable room and be kindly treated and have a respected easy old age. But do not let us go back through that awful passage, I cannot imagine what it was built for!"

"Nor I, Signora; Donna Lorina must have discovered it by accident, but it does not matter as long as it brought us to where 'Cupid guards.'"

"No, it does not matter, only I should like to know its purpose," she said, as they rose.

Had the light of their lanterns penetrated a little beyond the slide through which they emerged they would have seen that the passage went on around the tower, taking a sudden dip underground, and had they cared to explore still further they would have found that it was there tunneled out of solid rock and continued on some distance until it ended in an iron door opening upon the mountain, which was cleverly hidden by rocks and shrubs. It had been used in feudal times to bring supplies and men into the castle during long sieges, but for centuries the entrance on the mountain had been lost, broken rock had fallen and a thick undergrowth had gathered and nature, assisting man, had completely concealed it.

Ferruccio scanned the premises. On one side of the enclosure was the wreck of the fallen north tower, covering a possible gate or some means of exit; then he measured with his eye the holes where the stones had dropped away, to which she had referred. "Yes, Signora," he said, "we can go around outdoors. If we had but known where 'Cupid guarded' we need not have come the other way at all."

"Of course not, but it makes an interesting and exciting excursion now that it is past and we are successful."

She had already begun to think what she would do with her share of the jewels. Go to Perugia and turn some of them into money! But there was Leone to be won over; he might be so unreasonable about her finding them through the dwarf that he would prevent this; then again if she should go there before his return how could she account for the money and things she meant to buy, unless she told him?

It was a problem that she was too excited to solve now, she must take time to think and plan, but oh, the chief thing was that she actually had them, for Ferruccio had put the pouch in her hand, shouldered his pick-ax and taken up his lantern and torch.

"It strikes me, Signora, that the walls inside are not so likely to fall as this outer one; see how it slants over there?"

"It has stood all these years, I think it will last a little longer," Margaret said laughing.

She ran to one of the apertures, which looked as if it might have been beaten through at some storming of the castle by a battering-ram.

The ground outside was almost even, and she climbed and wriggled through without hurting herself and saw just beyond the old well. This dangerous spot had always fascinated her and she walked toward it. The big tottering stone that Leone was often tempted to push in lay balanced half over the edge. Ough! how black and deep the water; had she ever been mad enough to think of ending her life there with the first shock of realizing that she was to become a mother? And now how glad she was that she had not. The blessed memory of her little son, Leone's still devoted love, the blue sky, the green shrubbery, even in its rankness among these ruins, told of bright spring-time and her phenomenal luck. Oh, no, life was sweet, and she thanked God she lived.

Suddenly there came a crash behind her. Turning in alarm she saw part of the wall through which she had just passed in safety had given way and loose stones were tumbling down, one

on top of the other. With a cry of horror she bounded back, keeping off until the falling should cease. She could see to some extent inside the inclosure now. Where was Ferruccio? She heard a groan. "Ferruccio," she cried, "Ferruccio, where are you?"

Faintly his voice replied, "*Ecco —*"

Almost hidden under a pile of fallen stones she saw him lying with a gash in his head. "Ferruccio, oh, Ferruccio."

In an instant she was kneeling beside him, trying to extricate him; but he groaned again, and the stones were so heavy she could not lift one of them. "I will run to the house for Clemente," she said. "Oh, my poor good Ferruccio!"

"No, no, do not leave me, *cara Signora*," he begged faintly, "I am dying."

"Oh, not that, not that! It can't be true," she cried, horror-stricken, "let me go for help —"

He put out his hand and caught her dress. "No one can help me," he whispered. "I was almost through when my pick-axe caught on a loose stone, I could feel it drag — and then — the wall fell. *Cara Signora*, do not leave me to die alone!"

"No, no, but you must not die. I shall feel that I have killed you, for not going back the other way. Oh, I shall never, never forgive myself."

"*Silenzio*, Signora, I am old, I am ill, I am useless. I die happy —" his voice grew weaker. "Heaven has granted me the wish of my life, to find the jewels of Donna Lorina and to have you believe my story. You do, Signora, you do?"

"Every word of it."

"Signora, I give them all to you. Come closer. Hide them. Tell no one. You are alone. When the young Signore returns he can protect you and them. Signora — are you there?"

"Right here, dear good friend," Margaret said almost sobbing, "close beside you," and she took his hard knotty hand and stroked it.

The blood was pouring from the wound in his head. She knew the meaning of that yellow pallor, she had seen it on her own child's face.

"Signora," he whispered again, this time so low she was obliged to bend over to hear him. "The jewels are all yours, but the star, you understand, that is for Our Lady. I promised it to her. She will not mind your wearing it during your lifetime. You are her sweet young daughter, and she blesses you for your kindness to a poor, ugly old man —"

"Don't say that, Ferruccio, I have done nothing — nothing —"

He closed his eyes and Margaret thought he was gone, but after a moment he opened them again, "Signora, are you there?"

"Yes, yes —"

"It's so dark, I — cannot — see — you —"

Margaret took his cold hand in both of her warm ones and held it tight. Oh, what could she do; this honest faithful, simple soul should have a priest, and the last rites of the Church.

He tried to raise himself. "That's it," he gasped, "I see it, the star — shining — like silver, there — over — there," and he fell back dead.

Down upon the furrowed countenance Margaret's tears fell. She knelt on for some moments praying for his soul, then she folded his hands and closed his eyes, as she had seen Giacinta close the baby's eyes.

She rose and pulled up some shrubs, though the thorns tore her hands, and covered him as best she could with green branches; then she picked up the dirty pigskin pouch that held the treasure, all hers now, and taking the two lanterns she left him. No one would know that the *jettatura* who had been the terror of the castle lay there, for stones and boughs concealed his body.

## CHAPTER XXV

### THE MURDERER

Life's richest cup is Love's to fill —  
Who drinks if deep the draught shall be,  
Knows all the rapture of the hill,  
Blent with the heart-break of the sea.

SAMUEL ROGERS.

Slowly and soberly Margaret walked around all the turnings and towers, up the terrace, into the house and straight to her own room.

She poured water into the basin and bathed her face and hands, then she sat down upon the couch, wearied out, to think. The lunch Lisa had brought was lying upon a table and a flask of Chianti. She did not want food but she believed a glass of wine would do her good. She went over to the table and drank a few swallows, when she remembered her sister's letter, which poor Ferruccio had found and given her. It would draw her thoughts from the fearful thing that had just happened and of which she dared not speak to the superstitious servants.

She brought the Chianti over to the couch and making herself comfortable with pillows, took the letter from her blouse where she had hastily thrust it a few hours earlier and broke the seal.

Instead of a newsy home epistle there were only a few lines, with another letter enclosed. What in the world was Josephine sending her? A business envelope addressed to herself! Filled with curiosity she opened it and something fell out — a check! What did it mean?

A draft on a bank in Perugia for five hundred dollars, made payable to Margaret L. Randolph and signed "Hartman and Withers." What, what does this mean; then she read:

NEW YORK, April —, 19—

*Margaret L. Randolph.*

DEAR MISS RANDOLPH: We beg to inform you that by the will of the late Cornelia Randolph Ward you are named as sole heiress, with the exception of a few legacies and personal bequests which are left to friends—

What, what was this?

Cousin Cornelia dead, and she her heiress?

Margaret could scarcely hold the paper; her hand was shaking so the characters danced before her eyes.

The rest of her wine served to steady her nerves, and she read on:

We trust that you may find it convenient to return to the United States promptly, as it is most necessary that you should be here for the settling up of the estate which consists of railroad securities, mining stock, bonds, mortgages, personal and real estate, both in the city of New York and in the state of California.

Mr. Henry Gill Withers of the undersigned and Mr. Wallace J. Grant of this city are the Executors for the deceased.

We enclose you our check for your return and should you need more you will kindly advise us.

We remain very truly yours,

HARTMAN AND WITHERS,  
Attorneys at Law.

Cable address:

"Withart"

New York

Western Union code.

Twice she read the letter but she could not take it in. She believed she was dreaming; but how skeptical she had been about the jewels and here they were beside her!

Oh, no, no, there was no mistake. Cousin Cornelia had forgiven her and left her her money! Oh, for some one to rejoice with; for some one to whom she might tell the good fortune. Should she cry or laugh or dance?

She arose and poured out more wine. She felt as if she could drink the contents of the entire flask; she needed it in her intense excitement.

Now what did Josephine say?

*Dearest Margaret:*

I have asked Mr. Withers to let me enclose his letter with mine, as I want to be the first to congratulate you. My dear, you will have a stunning income, only think of it! Was it not lovely of poor dear Cousin Cornelia? She has left me some of the heavy old Randolph silver and her diamond and pearl necklace which I always envied, and Wallace Grant has the oil paintings, but her Fifth Avenue house and almost everything else goes to you. Mother and I have lately had an idea she meant to leave you something, but we never dreamed of all this.

Now dearest Peggie, you must come home at once, by the very next steamer, as we are wild to see you and it's most important that you should be here. I am arranging a room especially for you, as we think it would be lonely for you at first to go to your own house.

Cable us what steamer you will sail by and Phil and I will meet you.

With dearest love from mother and all of us,  
Your devoted sister,

JOSEPHINE.

P.S. I think you owe your good fortune to Wallace Grant. He has talked to Cousin Cornelia, I know, and told her she was rather hard upon you, you were so young at that time. Phil is sending you papers with the account of her death and funeral.

J. D.

This letter was the last drop. When she was poor and had nowhere to go there was no room for her in Mrs. Dacre's home, but now — "we think it will be too lonely for you to go at first to your own house."

Margaret threw herself on the couch and sobbed aloud from a mixture of the extreme emotions of the day.

When she had had her cry out she felt better and calmer and then came a rush of happiness as she began to realize it all. She could go home at last. See her mother, her sister, her old friends, her native land. Home! Home! Home!!

Her lunch made her ready for action.

But Leone — what about him? Would he let her go, would he insist upon going also? She thought he would not do the latter, but he might upbraid her for leaving him and make it very hard. She must go at once, during his absence, then there would be no wrench of parting and no scene. Yes, she

must go now, that was obvious and she would come back in two months.

She went into his room and found a Perugia newspaper which advertised the ocean steamers with dates of sailing. One left the day after to-morrow from Genoa at 10 A. M. If she could get to Fossato in time she could catch the train for Perugia to-night, go to the bank in the morning and on to Genoa, buy her ticket and some necessary things for the voyage, send her cablegram and get away. Ah, but she was unknown in Perugia and the bank would not honor her draft without identification.

What could she do? The jewels! She would pawn something and raise money enough for the journey, and when she returned in June could redeem it. She would be here to welcome Fauvel and oh, how much she would do for them all, what presents she would bring!

Surely no one could blame her for leaving when her family and her lawyers had sent for her. Her lawyers, her property, how important she felt. Then she caught a glimpse of herself in the wardrobe mirror; what a shabby "dud" Miss Randolph was! Her sister's maids would scorn the clothes she had on. She laughed as she thought of it. Never mind; she would make it up to herself when she once got back to the shops.

Five hundred dollars just to go home with, and she was to let Hartman and Withers know if she needed more; the draft though waste paper in her present circumstances was after all the confirmation of this wonderful thing, and she laughed as she had sobbed a few minutes before, while the tragic death of poor Ferruccio also added to the tension of her nerves.

She pulled the worn bell cord so violently it almost snapped and when she heard the old servant woman's shuffling steps approaching, she tucked the pig-skin pouch under a pillow. Ferruccio's warning and her own common sense told her neither to *speak of the jewels* nor to show them.

"Lisa," she said, "bring me out that small low trunk from behind the curtain, and then I want you to go and tell Clemente to harness up without delay and drive me to Fossato. I am going away."

"Going away, Signora?"

"Yes, I have had news from my home; they have sent for me. A cousin of mine has died and left me all her money; she was rich, very rich."

Margaret felt that she must tell her good news to some one. "And that is why I must go," she continued, "to attend to it — my property. I shall be back again by the end of June. Don't stand there, make haste, I have so little time."

Lisa was astounded. That a young lady, a wife, should think of leaving home in her husband's absence, without his consent; it was beyond words. But there was no telling what wild thing an American might not do; they had come from red-skinned savages, she had heard, so she obeyed, not daring to disobey, though disapproving; all the while Margaret was sorting clothing and articles for her journey.

"Yes, my long cloak, that will do on the steamer, not that brown skirt, Armida may have that. Give it to her. Oh, Lisa, did you ever hear of happiness killing one? When I come back I will bring you a silk dress and Clemente a gold-headed cane. Lisa, pinch my arm; hard, harder. I want to see if I am awake or dreaming. Ah, if you only understood English, you could tell me whether I have read this letter aright; but there — I know I have," and Margaret continued to throw things recklessly in the trunk; what did it matter if they were crumpled; they were worn out and old fashioned, anyway; soon she would have everything beautiful and new.

And Lisa watched her open-mouthed, believing she had lost her reason. She was not sure but that she ought to lock her in until her husband returned.

When Lisa was gone Margaret took from the hollow stand of a Japanese vase where she had hidden it, a tiny blue and

white shoe; this shoe should go with her; then she found a small silk bag and emptied the jewels into it and strung it around her neck, inside her clothing, and threw the pouch out of the window. Now for her letter to Leone; then that was all.

"Amore," she wrote. "To-day a letter from my sister was given to me saying that I have inherited a large sum of money and they have sent for me to come home at once, which I must do, to sign papers, etc.

"It is hard to go without seeing you, but the sooner I leave the sooner I can come back. Look for me when your roses are in bloom. I will write you from the steamer, and again as soon as I arrive in New York, and take care of yourself, for I love you, I love you, *Leonino mio*.

"I write in great haste as I must reach Fossato in time for the train and cannot say half that I wish to. I have to take some of your magazine money to pay my railroad fare, until I can get to Perugia. I will send it back at once, for I have plenty now and when I return we can do so much and have all we want.

"I will bring you a repeater' watch like Fauvel's and a Winchester rifle.

"Love me and trust me, my own dearest, for I am

"Always yours,

"MARGHERITA.

"P.S. The body of the poor dwarf lies over by the ruins. Give it honorable burial for my sake. He was good and honest, as I can prove to you.

"M."

Lisa was knocking at the door. "*Avanti!*" she called, and, sealing her letter, fastened it on Leone's pin cushion.

"Clemente has the toothache, Signora; it is very bad, yet he will go. But he will have to take the cart, as there is only one horse in the stable. He also makes bold to advise the Signora to wait until her husband can accompany her, though of course she will do as she pleases —"

"Of course she will," said Margaret, laughing.

Just as she had left Rome on the spur of the moment so she was leaving Rocca Serrata, without time for consideration.

"Tell Clemente," she continued, "not to worry — it is perfectly proper for me to go. Oh, how little I thought when I

got out of bed this morning that I would not sleep here to-night! Lisa, this has been the most eventful day of my life."

Seated beside Clemente, with his face bound up and his old rain-stained hat pulled over his eyes in the muddy, rickety cart, her trunk behind her and wearing an out-of-date faded serge, Margaret might have been mistaken for a pretty better-class emigrant about to take passage for the new world; but no one in the kingdom of Italy felt as rich as she and no one knew of the fortune in jewels underneath her cheap blouse, nor of the draft on the bank in Perugia, which, though she could not make use of it, made her feel wealthy and secure.

The horse jogged down the steep road and she turned round to take a last look at the old fortress that had been her home for three years, and it seemed to frown upon her ominously for leaving its sheltering walls.

\* \* \* \* \*

Up the slope from the valley rode the "*bel giovanotto*," as the peasants called young Belmonte. He had been away a day longer than he had expected, for the river, swollen from ravines that brought down torrents of melted snow, had swept away the ancient camel-backed bridge and he had been obliged to go miles out of the main road in order to cross.

The commissions of Fauvel had been attended to promptly and well, and self-satisfaction is good; the letter was on its way to Paris and now he was returning, happy and light hearted in the glorious spring weather. The scent of fresh earth was exhilarating, the sun shone brightly and the roadsides were purple and gold with violets and dandelions, and here and there a budding narcissus perfumed the breeze that stirred a tall poplar into waving grace as it rustled its silvery leaves.

There was a rich color in Leone's youthful face and the light of the gladness of life was in his eyes, for springtime to an Italian of his temperament is like maddening wine. And now he came in view of Rocca Serrata; the sun's rays at this hour were slanting directly upon it, bringing it out in imperious

relief from the gigantic rock. Instinctively he raised his cap — it was the dwelling of Margherita.

Had she missed him as much as he had missed her? He could scarcely wait to take her in his arms again, and he gave the mare Fiora a sharp flick of the whip to urge her on.

He had allowed Beppo to remain to visit his mother in one of the neighboring villages, as he had something to do on the way home and wanted to be alone. There was a hammer and chisel in the saddle-bags which he had brought purposely, and he had dismounted near a shrine of the "Pieta," and had tied Fiora. He began his work by chalking five letters on a smooth rock above a little curtain of trailing plants.

It was a laborious task to chip the hard stone and the letters were rough and uneven when finished, but yet perfectly legible, and they spelled the word "A M O R E."

In a week or so, when the ground was drier and the small canker roses and amaryllis had come out, he would bring Margherita and show her the inscription above the grave of their child.

He was so near the castle now that he felt sure she could see him from some window where she might be watching; another quarter of an hour and he was riding through the gateway singing out gaily, "*Hola!* I have come!"

Why did he not hear her reply, nor see her running to meet him? He leaped from the horse and went into the house; but there was no sign of her, or any one. He called, "Margherita! Margherita!" No answer. He went through the corridor, still calling, but only an echo came back to him — "rita." He stood still, perplexed. Well, she must be up in her room; but how thoughtless of her not to be on the lookout for him, unless she were ill. *Grand Dio!* Could she be ill?

He tore up the stairs, thinking as he did so that he heard a low, unpleasant laugh, but upon looking back he could perceive no one. Opening Margaret's door, he found her room in disorder. What did it mean? She was so neat, so particular

about her things, and now they were strewn over chairs and tables, the wardrobe nearly empty, with the doors thrown back and soapy water in the basin. Lisa, with the laxity of Italian servants, had put off arranging the room after the Signora's hurried departure, and everything was just as she had left it. Bewildered and alarmed, Leone passed into his own room; here all was tidy and in order. He spied the note on his pin cushion and snatching it up, he tore it open.

"Amore," he read. What — what! She had gone? Margherita gone? Left Rocca Serrata on Tuesday, and this was Saturday! She had been gone four days! *Madre di Dio*, what should he do!

His dismay now turned to anger. He would go right after her and bring her back. How dared she run away like this? She was his wife, she should have asked his permission, or at least consulted him before taking such a sudden step. Had he ever put a straw in her way about anything she wanted to do? No; he had only lived to make her happy, and she knew it. In his anger he lashed the air with the riding whip still in his hand.

If it was necessary for her to return to the United States for a few weeks, he would have gone or sent Clemente with her as far as the steamer, to see that she got off properly and put her in the care of the captain or "*Reggio Commissario*"; he did not approve of young women traveling alone. And lastly her letter sought to pacify him by speaking of her money and what good times they would have on it — the presents she would bring — it was an insult!

What kind of man did she take him for that he would live on her money? Some men lived on their wives' money, but not an Estori! The Estoris were rich themselves, and proud — only *he* was poor. He believed that if he could catch her now he would whip her until she was striped like a zebra!

But after the anger came the realizing agony that she was gone. His arms were empty. Beat her? Oh, no; he would

try to share her joy in her good fortune. He had been happy and contented in their poverty, but she longed for what money could give and he ought to be glad that she had it. Yes, he would have helped her to do whatever was right in the case and she might have had enough confidence in him to know it. She should have waited for his return.

"Oh, Margherita, how could you, how could you!"

"The body of the dwarf lies over by the ruins," he read. So he had been poking around again, had he? And in the very place where he had been forbidden to go, and had gotten himself killed just as Fauvel had predicted. He was not mistaken then about seeing him a few days ago, the wretched *jettatura*, whose visits invariably brought trouble. Something dreadful happened whenever this dwarf appeared; he deserved to die! And why should he have "honorable burial" for her sake? What was this scurvy creature to Margherita, this low, miserable peasant? Some intuition had been telling him that Margherita knew more about the fellow than she would say.

"Honorable burial," indeed! Let the birds of prey devour his dirty carcass. If he was so much to Margherita, why did she not stay at home and be chief mourner at his funeral! In his anger he tore the letter into little bits and threw them upon the floor. He was deeply hurt, mystified and enraged; and went downstairs again to interview Clemente, ringing the call bell furiously. He rang three times and receiving no response, which irritated him still further, he strode over to the steward's quarters.

The mediæval kitchen with its enormous fireplace big enough to roast a whole ox, was empty, also the servants' hall; so he went on to where Clemente slept. Here the sound of lamentations reached him before he came to the door and he found Clemente groaning in bed. The room was darkened and the air impure.

"*Diavolo!* What is the matter with you?" he said angrily. His usually sweet temper was so roused that he felt he might

be dangerous to any one who tried him too far. "Stop that noise and tell me about the Signora, exactly the hour she left and what were her plans."

"I drove her to Fossato on Tuesday," Clemente began between his groans, "about four o'clock. Lisa and I advised her to wait for you, Signore, but she is headstrong — the Signora Margherita — she would not listen; she seemed to be in a great state of excitement, and talked and laughed and cried all at once. She took a small trunk and I saw her board the train for Perugia; she said she must catch a steamer for New York which was to sail from Genoa yesterday morning and that she would be back here by the end of June. That is all I know, Signore. Oh, my poor tooth! It was bad enough that day, but driving home in the night air made it worse — ough! — ough!"

*Sailed yesterday!* Then he could not go after her. She was absolutely gone, gone!

Clemente began to wail again. He was a most sensible old man when well and very helpful if others were ill, but for the least ailment that affected himself he behaved like a child.

"Oh, Signore, that is not the worst that has happened. The *jettatura* — the evil one — the dwarf —"

"Yes, I know," Leone interrupted; "where is Lisa?"

"Gone down to the monastery for a couple of blessed candles; we must burn them to take the curse off this house. I am not strong enough to bury him alone and Beppo and Illario both away, and there he lies rotting in the sun, still working evil spells even in death — ough!" and Clemente gave a cry; "there it goes again, my tooth, my tooth! It has me crazed — *pazzo* with the pain. Three nights have I walked the floor and not a wink of sleep have I had between it and the corpse, thinking how I could bury it before the story gets round. Oh, Signore, how could you do it?"

"What story? Do what, you raving dotard? I was obliged to go away. I wish to God I had not. Don't lie there howl-

ing. If your tooth is so bad, get up and go to Fossato and see a dentist." With that he turned and left the room; was he to be annoyed by so sordid a thing as a servant's toothache when he was in such distress of mind?

He walked back again and went into the cedar room. Fleur-ette was scratching noisily upon the floor of her cage. He saw that her seed cup was empty. Mechanically he removed it, went to the cabinet, filled it with sunflower seeds and snapped it back in place. Turning, he saw Carlotta standing in the doorway. She held a jet black kitten up against her pink cheek and greeted him with a sarcastic smile.

"What are you doing here?" he asked rudely. "I told you never to come back."

"Oh, did you? Well, as this happens to be the house of Signor Fauvel and he has never forbidden my coming, I don't know that what you say has any particular weight. I came to get my kitten; there was this black one among the last litter of the Signora's cat and she gave it to me and I have kept it here until it was old enough to be taken from its mother. I came for it on Wednesday morning and found you were off in the mountains and the Signora gone to Paris."

"To Paris?"

"Yes, to Paris," she repeated.

"To the United States, you mean. She has inherited property there, and it was necessary for her to go."

He would not let Carlotta think that he criticized in any way the departure of Margherita. "She will be back soon," he added carelessly.

"That's what she says," Carlotta answered significantly, "but I know that she has gone to Paris to join Fauvel."

"She has not," Leone declared indignantly, his eyes flashing. "She has gone to her own people in New York."

"Wait, Signore Leone. Does it not look suspicious that Fauvel should have sent you away and that this letter came for *her* which takes her away during your absence? I know every-

thing that has happened, from Lisa and Clemente. I've been stopping here three days, waiting for you to return and to warn you."

"You might have saved yourself the trouble. I will not hear a word against either the Signora or Fauvel."

"Think! It takes a big sum of money to go from Italy to New York and travel the way in which *she* would want to go, is not that true? Where did she get it? Not from you — you have only just learned that she is gone!"

"It's none of your business where she got it!" Leone said darkly.

"Perhaps not," she retorted, "but it is yours."

"Her family sent her the money, of course," he said.

Carlotta threw back her head and laughed, a hateful, mocking laugh, that made his blood surge.

"You simpleton!" she said. "She has gone to Paris to be with Fauvel. He loves her, see here!"

She tossed upon the table of piece of paper; it was a pencil sketch of Margaret with her baby in her arms, and written underneath, "A Second Love."

Leone knew that Fauvel made no secret of his affection and admiration for Margaret, but it had always appeared to be rather a fatherly tenderness; he also knew that Fauvel had had a serious love affair in his youth, and that he said openly he had never really loved since. But now — here it was in his own writing, "A Second Love."

In reality those three words under the little offhand sketch referred simply to Margaret herself and were a most delicate compliment to Leone, as it was his child that typified the "Second Love."

But he was too blinded just then to analyze, and took in only what he saw. Carlotta watched the hot color mount to his face and then rush away again, leaving him almost pale, and knew she had gained a point.

"Fauvel loves the Signora, I tell you," she continued, "and

the Signora longs for gay times and fine clothes. He can give them to her. Fauvel is called 'rich and stingy,' because he lives quietly without any show, but he is not stingy to women; I know from gossip in Perugia. His women have everything they want while the affair lasts; they usually last about two months. The signora said she would come back in June, did she not? So will he. Two months of pleasure and gaiety and then the good little wife will return to her adoring husband, whose only fortune is his good looks, and the story of her inherited wealth will account for what dresses and jewelry she may bring home with her. Ha, ha, it is as clear as daylight, and any one but a fool would see."

"It is a lie!" he cried, crushing the sketch and flinging it from him; "a lie! Fauvel is not that kind, though he is a man and can stand it; but the Signora I will not hear defamed."

He grasped the whip he had laid down while attending to the macaw. The wild blood of his Sicilian grandfather, latent in his veins, rose in terrific force with the desire to slash and rend ruthlessly. "Carlotta Santoni," he cried, brandishing the whip above his head, "I would like to kill you."

"You had better not touch me," she said insolently, but retreating as she spoke, for his looks and attitude were alarming. "I should think you had stains enough on your hands already."

"What is the matter with my hands?" and he glanced at them. "What do you mean? You speak in riddles."

"Do I? I think not. I told you I came up for my kitten on Wednesday morning, but it scampered away from me, ran a long way round the house and over by the ruins. I followed it and saw it jump behind a pile of stones. I went after it, looking for it among the brushwood and brambles by the broken wall near the old well. As I parted the branches I screamed — I screamed again and again. Lying there hidden, with stones and boughs broken off on purpose to cover him, was the *jetta* — dead, with a hole in his head and the blood all clotted

upon it — I screamed — I shrieked! Clemente and Lisa heard me and came running over; they saw, too, and Clemente said he must have been dead for twenty-four hours — and you killed him — you, you, you!”

“Stop!” he cried, “that is another lie — a damnable lie. I did not even know he was dead until I came home, less than an hour ago. How dare you say this, how dare you!”

“Because I heard you threaten to kill him; the whole house has heard you over and over again.”

Carlotta held the black kitten in front of her face as she spoke, for the whip had an unpleasant look.

“Get out of here,” he cried, “quick, before I hurt you. Only your sex keeps me from knocking you down. Do you hear me — go! — and never show your face here again, she-devil — traducer — liar — begone, before I strike you!”

Seeing him prepared to carry out his threat as he moved toward her, Carlotta fled screaming. After she had gone, Leone paced up and down the length of the long room; up and down, his blood at white heat, his brain bursting. The venom in the girl’s words had found its way to his heart and was working like deadly poison in his system. Was there any truth in what she had hinted? Was it possible that Fauvel and Margaret cared for one another in secret and had deceived him? Could any two people be so false? Was the world utterly vile?

Fauvel might care for Margherita, any man would — but how could she care for him? Fauvel was more than twenty years her senior. Oh, no, the idea was too horrible. He must not, he would not allow a thought which was an insult to them both to have place in his mind. It was only women like Carlotta whose own lives were corrupt, who would even have imagined such a preposterous thing. He bit the corner of his handkerchief, and yet — and yet — the letter that had bidden Margaret leave Rocca Serrata had not come with the ordinary mail. Some private messenger must have brought it; and she made no mention of any money being sent by her family, but

she had taken his money, until she could reach Perugia. Some one was to meet her in Perugia to supply her with funds for the rest of the journey, and this story of going to the United States might be concocted to throw him off the track.

Then the sketch, "A Second Love." What did it all mean? *Grand Dio!* The thought of Margherita in the arms of Fauvel was more than he could bear. Fauvel was considered handsome, and he remembered how he had noticed the artist's clean, blond comeliness when he had watched him put on evening dress in Rome, and Margherita made no secret of her admiration for Fauvel's learning and ability. It was the first time in Leone's life that he had ever experienced jealousy, and its corroding acid ate into his very vitals like physical pain. If it were true that Fauvel had enticed Margherita from him, he would kick him to death! And Margherita — what fit punishment could he devise for her? And still up and down he walked like a caged and suffering animal.

Once Lisa came in and set a tray of luncheon down upon the table without speaking a word, gave a perfunctory sort of curtsy and left the room in haste, with the air of one who feared contamination. Very remarkable behavior. Could not a trusted servant give him even a smile of greeting?

He did not touch the food she brought and presently he heard the rattle of loose wheels and saw that Clemente was up and seated in the ramshackle vehicle, probably going to take his advice and see the dentist at Fossato. But these matters were too trivial to divert his mind from his woe except for the moment.

What should he do? That was the question. Go to Paris and surprise them? But if they should not be together what a fool he would appear, and Fauvel had a way of making him feel very small at times when he did rash or childish things. Should he go to Perugia and cable to New York, to the sister of Margherita and ask if it were true about the wonderful inheritance? But the long message he would be obliged to send

would cost tremendously and make Margherita very angry, for Signor Belmonte was supposed by her family to be the husband of the lady to whom Margherita was companion, and they must never know anything about him; besides, this might provoke her so that she would never come back. Oh, why had he not insisted upon a civil marriage all this time? Then he would have legal rights on his side; now she had everything on hers.

Well, this was Friday; if she really had gone to Genoa and written him from the steamer, her letter ought to reach him to-morrow. The only thing to do was to wait.

He remembered that the mare Fiora had been standing in the courtyard all this time, and that there was no one to attend to her but himself. He picked up his cap, went out and led her round to the stable, where he watered and unsaddled her, and put her in the stall, then strolled dejectedly around the grounds until he reached the terrace, where he began to walk again, up and down, trying to picture what Margherita was doing if she were actually at sea.

It would be scarcely less comforting to think of her in New York than in Paris, for there lived that rich man to whom she had been engaged. He knew all about Wallace Grant and his fortune, for Margherita often translated her family letters to him; he believed they would do their utmost to make her renew her engagement, and perhaps she would listen to them this time.

At last he became so exhausted from his walk that he sank down upon a step. He must have been walking for hours, he believed, as the sun was now low in the heavens and shining full in his face. He felt lonely beyond words. If he only had his son! This time last spring the *bambino* was here playing beside him, and just as the first torturing wound caused by the child's cruel death was beginning to heal it now reopened and his longing and grief for the little one added to his misery.

In a tree opposite a bird was chirping to its mate, and two squirrels ran out gamboling together over the new grass in the

innocent enjoyment of their lives. He watched them. Everything was happy but himself, everything had its mate, and his mate was gone!

Two months!

How happy and how miserable, both, he had been since first meeting Margherita! Before he had known her he had been always happy and contented with his lot and his thoughts reverted to his boyhood and early youth, spent in the old convent on the Palatine. Was he "Fra Felice"? What had become of his associates, he wondered, who had believed him dead for more than three years? About this hour they would be assembling in the chapel for vespers; did they ever speak of him? And his cousin Daniele, Prince Estori, whom he had deceived for the sake of Margherita! And his mind wandered back to the old days in Rome before she came into his life. A shadow suddenly fell between him and the sun, and looking up he saw two soldiers with white cross-belts and gleaming accoutrements. *Carabinieri!* What were they doing here? He had not heard them approach; they must have come round by the ramparts over the soft ground. One of them spoke:

"Is this the Signor Belmonte?"

"It is," Leone said, rising; he had a liking for men in military service, and was glad of a break in his solitude; there was evidently some excitement on hand. "What can I do for you?" he added.

"There is an order out, Signore, for your arrest," said one.

"For my arrest — mine?"

"Yes."

"On what charge?"

"On the charge of murder. The murder of one Ferruccio, a dwarf."

"What!" he cried. "What—" Then more calmly: "This is absurd."

"I fear," said the first, "that you may not find it quite so absurd as you think."

"Who accuses me?"

"The daughter of Taddeo Santoni, the postmaster and inn-keeper in the village of Rocca Serrata below."

"Ha!" he understood; this was Carlotta's revenge. The Lieutenant of the small detachment of carbineers stationed temporarily in the village was an admirer of Carlotta's. He saw it all. He threw back his head and laughed a loud, mirthless laugh. "My good fellows, a mistake has been made. The ruined wall fell and killed the dwarf, as it would have killed you or me had we been hammering at it or pulling out the stones. This is what happened to the dwarf, a low vagrant who had been forbidden to come upon the premises and especially warned of the danger in which he placed himself. I have been absent four days, and knew nothing of this until my return."

"The examination of the body shows he has been dead four days and was carefully concealed. The dead, Signore, cannot do that for themselves."

"I tell you, man, this accusation has been made out of spite," Leone replied.

"You have been heard by more than one person to threaten his life."

Leone stood a few steps above on the terrace and looked down upon them scornfully. "This is all a mistake," he said, trying to speak carelessly, yet feeling that he was losing ground; "it is a lie — a trumped-up lie."

"There is no use wasting words," said the other. "You are to come along with us now. You will have a chance to defend yourself at your trial."

What was this? His trial — he on trial for murder!

He was about to call for Clemente, forgetting that he had driven away, to come and uphold him in assuring the carbineers that this was a grave mistake; then he recalled the old steward's words, which at the time he had misunderstood: "Oh, Signore, how could you do it?"

Clemente believed him guilty!

He had one more chance.

"Let me see your warrant," he said.

"*Ecco, Signore,*" and the man brought out a paper officially signed, "here is the order to conduct you at once to the jail at Fossato, so you had better yield before we are obliged to use force."

Leone retreated a step. It flashed through his mind that this was part of a plot. Carlotta was an accomplice of Fauvel. The dwarf had been killed, his body hidden and he accused of the crime. He was to be sent to jail to be gotten rid of. And from there — *Madre di Dio!* The penitentiary at Elba — the *galleria!* For him — an Estori, never!

Quick as lightning he lunged forward, having the advantage from his position on higher ground and struck one of the men a sudden terrific blow that felled him; and as the other was about to seize his arm he slashed him across the face with his whip, blinding him so that he staggered with pain.

In that one desperate second he tore into the house, the next moment the carbineers were following hot upon him, but he had that one moment, and he knew the winding of the corridors and they had nothing to guide them but his ringing footsteps. Once they almost came up to him as he ran out of the house again, and one of the men levelled his rifle and fired, but he had disappeared behind an angle of the building, and tearing after him they saw him darting round a shed. The man fired another shot which hit him, for he gave a short cry and threw up his arm, half stopping for an instant; then on he flew.

The chase led them over to the ruins where the corpse lay. Once more they caught sight of him, but a huge flying buttress lost him to their view; then they heard a terrific splash and coming to an open space they found he had vanished.

There was a half-fallen tower with a ruinous wall before it, in which there were yawning holes broken through and there was a low, crumbling semicircle of ancient stonework opposite,

all that remained to warn the unwary of the treacherous well. One of the men picked up a whip and exchanged glances with his companion. Hurrying to the well, they looked in. Far below the dark water was still agitated and on its surface floated a cap with a bright flamingo feather.



**PART III**  
**MISS RANDOLPH**



## CHAPTER XXVI

### LEARNING THE TRUTH

"By memory carefully laid upon shelves,  
Identified only by God and ourselves."

In a paper published weekly in New York that dealt chiefly with the doings and private affairs of the smart set appeared the following extract:

Though it is four years since Miss Randolph came into a splendid fortune society has seen nothing of her. For a long time she shut herself up as if in bereavement and apparently found no pleasure in wealth and gaiety. She has devoted her life to the care of her invalid mother whose death occurred last Monday.

Miss Randolph is renowned for her generosity, her name is always seen among the public charities, and we hear that many of her personal friends who are not so fortunate as she is are given means to gratify longings which they cannot afford and no one knows unless they tell it. She has endowed a bed in the Babies' Hospital, and maintains a home in Westchester for aged Italian men, called Casa Ferruccio, and she is actively interested in most of the Italian Missions. All are attracted by her sweet unaffected manner and we wonder how it is that she has remained "fancy free," for no suitor seems to be successful. Some say that she has left her heart in sunny Italy where she lived for several years, and others, that a Californian, well known in Wall Street and Club circles, intends to win her in the end.

The sympathy of her friends is extended to her in her loss.

The big handsome house on upper Fifth Avenue had its shades lowered, for the mother of the heiress had just been laid to rest and only a few relatives and intimate friends were within.

They had returned from the cemetery and were upstairs in the sitting room, which was furnished in "early English" and had a large photogravure view of the Colosseum, and the Arch of Titus over the mantelpiece.

Margaret had drawn aside from the others and was crying quietly by herself. She was pale and tired.

"Don't, Peggy dear," her sister, Mrs. Dacre, said kindly; "you must think of yourself now. You should have some one come and live with you."

"Margaret needs a complete change," spoke up a man who was standing by the fireplace, "she is worn out." It was the faithful Wallace Grant who was councillor and director in the management of her great wealth, who, though jilted by her when she was in her teens, had never ceased to care for her.

"Wallace is right," Mrs. Dacre said; "why don't you join the Le Roys and run down with them to White Sulphur Springs?"

"I am going to Italy, Jo;" Margaret answered slowly but firmly. "I have always wished to go back, but could not leave mother while she needed me; now I am free. I would like to spend Easter in Rome," and she gave a sad little sigh; "my housekeeper will take charge of everything while I am gone," she continued, "which will not be for long."

"I've always believed," Josephine remarked to her husband later, as he put her in their waiting limousine, "that Margaret had some sentimental love affair in Italy."

"I've sometimes thought so myself," was his reply.

Three weeks afterward a young American woman, dressed in costly mourning, stepped into a cab at the station in Rome. Glancing from the window, she saw that a few more hideous modern buildings had loomed up, otherwise the Eternal City appeared the same as when she had left it eight years ago, a poor, homeless girl, upon just such a spring day as this.

She was driven first to a banking house on the Piazza di Spagna and from there to the Palace Hotel, where she was told that the rooms she had wired for were ready and that "a friend" was upstairs waiting for her. As the elevator stopped at the third floor a door was opened and an elderly Italian woman received the traveller in her arms.

"*Cara mia, Signora!*" the woman exclaimed. "Do I really see you once more?"

"Darling Giacinta," Margaret answered, kissing her again, "I am back at last."

Giacinta removed her wraps while the porters deposited luggage and stood waiting for their tips.

"I have ordered tea for you, Signora," she said, "remembering how you enjoyed it in the old days."

"Ah, the old days," Margaret repeated, sighing. "Am I the same person? I sometimes think not."

"You are a rich and great lady now," Giacinta returned, looking with admiration at the beautifully fitting gown that set off the girlish figure to perfection. "I wonder, Signora, that you travel without servants?"

"I left my maid in New York on purpose, because I wished to be alone — alone with you. Besides, we do not have *great ladies* in America, as you understand it here. I am simply Miss Randolph, so you must not call me 'Signora' any more. And as for riches, they do not bring happiness. I cannot spend my income, and yet I never expect to be happy again," and Margaret threw herself upon the sofa and gave a long, deep sigh. "Sit down, Giacinta, and drink a cup of tea with me. I have come across the ocean to talk to you. I want you to live with me always now, as my companion, chaperon and friend; my mother's death leaves me all alone."

"Yes, *cara*, yes, how gladly will I do so," Giacinta said gratefully. "There is nothing to keep me from you now my poor brother is gone. I've been so interested in all you wrote me of *la povera mama*, and have said many prayers."

Giacinta's black hair was powdered with gray and she had grown stout, but she was the same satisfactory, refined, motherly person in whom the little lonely American had found comfort long ago; and Margaret's childish face had become more womanly but there was a sensitive expression mixed with the pretty.

wistfulness that a reader of character might say denoted the continual memory of some cruel hurt.

They talked on, taking up the threads of events since their separation, both wishing to come to the subject uppermost in their thoughts, yet each dreading to uncover the wound.

"You know, Giacinta," Margaret began, "when I first went home I intended coming back just as soon as my business matters were settled, but I caught the scarlet fever from my sister's children and I was desperately ill for months. My family never have known anything of my married life here in Italy. There were matters on the Signore's side to begin with that made it best for us to keep it to ourselves. Then we were so poor and my sister cannot forgive poverty. Yet in those days I always hoped that some time I might be able to acknowledge my husband, but when he died — oh, what was the use? 'Let the dead past bury its dead,' " and she sighed again.

"I do not see how you kept it from your people all these years. I should have thought letters might have betrayed it."

"Oh, no; I saw to that. I hired a private post office box in the name of 'Belmonte,' so that all my mail from Italy might come there. But, oh, Giacinta, I was wise for nothing. No mail that could have betrayed me came from Italy through all those long weeks when I was ill — none, that is, but unclaimed letters of my own. I had sent Signor Leone two letters before I was taken ill, and it was not until weeks after that I was strong enough to write again. Time went on and I heard nothing. I was mad with this secret distress, tortured with anxiety. I don't know why I did not die. I wrote to Clemente and he replied telling me how Leone had drowned himself in the horrible well," she shuddered, "because I had left him. The shock of that news made me desperately ill again, and I had no one to talk to —"

"Yes, yes, Signorina, you wrote me," Giacinta said, in soothing tones, "but we were living in France at that time, or I would have gone to the castle for you myself. But Clemente

should never have told you it was suicide, he should have let you think it was an accident."

"Oh, no, no; I wanted the truth. But it did not seem possible, for I had promised in the note I left for Leone that I would return. But you know how impulsive he was! Clemente seemed surprised that I had not heard from Fauvel confirming his account. But Fauvel has never sent me a line, although he always had my sister's address in case anything should happen to me. Then as I was convalescing, my mother had that stroke of paralysis, and I could not leave her after that. After all, what makes any difference now?"

"It's most peculiar that you never heard from him, he was such a punctilious gentleman."

"I know. I suppose he blamed me for Leone's death and for leaving without consulting him or saying 'good-bye.' And he was right. It was a cruel thing to do. Oh, how I have suffered for it!"

"*Cara mia*," Giacinta said gently, "time heals all wounds."

"It does not heal mine," Margaret replied, her eyes filling. "After months of hoping, longing and waiting for a letter from Fauvel, I put aside my pride and wrote to Santoni, Carlotta's father. I signed the old name, 'Belmonte,' of course, and received a most respectful answer, saying that the *Signore Artista* had only come back to Rocca Serrata to send away his pictures and had said that he did not wish to live there again after the unfortunate ending of the young Signore, and he knew nothing more about him, as Lisa and Clemente had gone away and the castle was closed. So you see that was the end. Fauvel had ceased to have any interest in me, and I would not place myself in a position to be slighted further. But how I have longed and longed for *you*, dear Giacinta, and now that my darling mother has gone there was nothing to keep me, and here I am. The human heart is bound to have an outlet and you are the only one in the whole world that I may talk to freely." And Margaret gave another long, deep sigh.

"*Carissima*," Giacinta said, "think no more of the past. You are young and rich and fair, there may be a future for you happier than you have ever dreamed of — you've had a long hard journey, would it not be well to lie down?"

"No, let me talk. Only think, the baby would be six years old. He would be playing with balls and toy airships, wouldn't he? Oh, don't you remember how he loved his little cart? And Leone might be a celebrated poet by this time. Do you know sometimes when I am alone at night I have horrible visions; I see the blood pouring from the baby's feet —"

"*Mia cara*, do not think of these things."

"But I cannot help it. I see Leone taking that desperate plunge. Oh, God, how rash he was, how impulsive! To kill himself without waiting to hear from me again. He must have been in some shocking state of mind, for he had a dread of death, and the well was so awful! It was not like wells made by man where one could recover a body and bury it — it was a frightful place! I hear his last frantic gasp as he sinks down — down into that bottomless reservoir, and then I see his body in some subterranean lake where it floats in the darkness. And from there drawn into a roaring channel, tossed from one chasm to another, dashed against rocks, whirling, dipping, shooting by with the rushing stream — forever in motion, forever unburied, in eternal unrest."

"Hush, hush, *carissima* —"

There was a knock. Giacinta rose to open the door. "A note, Signora, Signorina," she corrected herself. "The boy will wait for an answer."

"A note for me?" Margaret said, puzzled. "How strange! No one knows that I am here except my bankers." The note was written upon the hotel paper. She tore it open in nervous haste; it was in French, and read:

The writer begs to know if this is the same Mademoiselle Randolph with whom he was once acquainted. He has been absent from Rome for four years and seeing the above name on the hotel register has

taken this liberty. Should it be a mistake he craves pardon; if not, will the lady be kind enough to receive him?

MEURICE FAUVEL.

"Giacinta," Margaret gasped, "it is from Fauvel. He is under the same roof with us. Of course I'll see him. Tell the boy yes, yes, there is an answer."

Hurrying to the desk, she wrote:

*Monsieur Fauvel:*

I am the same. Giacinta is with me. I will receive you.

MARGARET RANDOLPH.

"Straighten things up quickly, Giacinta dear," she said, and passing into a bedroom she gave herself a few little touches to her toilet before the mirror. The color left her face as a step was heard in the corridor and Giacinta opened the door and in another instant Fauvel stood before her.

"Monsieur," Margaret said.

"Mademoiselle," he replied formally, with his essentially foreign bow, then turning to Giacinta, he greeted her cordially. Giacinta slipped into the next room and left them together.

"This is a most unexpected pleasure," Fauvel began, as he took the offered chair. "I always believed should we meet again that I would find you as 'Madame' and not 'Mademoiselle.'"

"And why?" Margaret asked, looking at him. He had aged. He was thin and pale and there were silver threads mixed with his blond hair.

"It was the natural supposition, Mademoiselle, when you vanished so suddenly four years ago. You once told me of a broken engagement to a wealthy man in New York, also how some of your home letters spoke of his untiring devotion to you. You had become bored at the castle. You could no longer stand the poverty you shared with the man you professed to love. You were a choice flower blooming in a deserted garden, you felt the need of being transplanted — pardon me, but L

always believed you were coaxed back by the rich suitor and had become his wife."

Margaret listened with something like haughtiness mingling with the amazement on her gentle face. How could he dare say such things to her? At last she answered him, quietly:

"I wrote you three times," she said, "explaining everything, and you never deigned one word of reply. My going home had nothing to do with any low inconstancy. I was sent for because I came into a lawful inheritance. I intended to return at once, but I had a long and dreadful illness. No word came from Leone. None from you. It is strange that I could live through such torture. Then my mother had a stroke —"

"I never received any letters from you, Margherita."

Both now dropped their frigid manner and were hanging on each other's words.

"How extraordinary!" she exclaimed. "But tell me what you heard when you went back to Rocca Serrata," she lowered her voice, "of all that had happened."

Fauvel looked at her strangely, then said: "You do not know then that immediately after you left Leone was accused of the murder of Ferruccio, the dwarf?"

"Oh, that is all wrong," she cried; "you don't know what you are talking about!"

"Perhaps you had better tell me," Fauvel answered, "you seem to know better than I."

"No, no; go on, go on."

"Leone was arrested, but before the *carabinieri* could seize him he ran over to the old well where they thought he jumped in."

"*They thought?*" she caught at those strange words.

"Yes; they thought he had drowned himself, for they heard a splash and saw his cap in the water. But when Clemente sent for me to come at once I went over the ground carefully and found that the big stone that had hung for ages over the

side of the well was gone; I felt sure that Leone had thrown *that* in, not himself, to outwit the guards."

"What!" she gasped. "He was not drowned?"

"No. There was an opening in the ruins, if you remember, just opposite the well through which he could easily make his way to a secret passage known only to him and myself. I searched there alone and found the clothes Leone had worn when he was last seen."

"Oh, God; oh, God!" she cried again and again, and pressed both hands against her heart, for it was beating so she felt it might kill her.

"From that moment," Fauvel continued, "I believed he had escaped. I learned that a young monk with a scrubby black beard who was unknown in those parts had passed through several villages, and I was convinced that Leone had remained hidden in the castle until his beard grew out, going at night to the larders for food, and then leaving after dark completely disguised in his old habit. I traced him as far as Assisi, there heard that he was very ill, for he had been struck by a rifle-ball while trying to escape. The wound had never been properly dressed, and he had walked for days when he should have kept quiet."

"Amore, Amore!" Margaret moaned; then rose to her feet.

"Tell me if he is living or dead?" she cried.

"Living —"

"Where?"

"That I do not know. I was not allowed to communicate with him in any way. Franciscan monks took charge of him. When he was sufficiently recovered they sent him to other monks of the same order in Genoa, but from there I could trace him no further, and I believe he is hiding in some monastery to-day, partly from a broken heart on account of your desertion, and partly for fear of being sent to prison for murder."

Margaret had grown as white as marble and was tottering. Fauvel rose also to catch her in case she should fall, but ~~she~~

straightened herself and laughed unnaturally, and the words came in short jerks from her trembling lips. "There was — no murder — the wall — fell — and killed — the dwarf — poor Ferruccio! He died — by my side. I can prove it — I —"

At that moment Giacinta appeared in the doorway. Margaret staggered to her and threw herself in her arms. "He lives, he lives, Giacinta!" she cried. "Leone lives!" then fell back unconscious.

Fauvel carried her into her room and laid her upon the bed. She soon revived and was able to talk calmly. She told the whole story of Ferruccio and the jewels. Fauvel listened with the gravest attention, making her repeat parts that seemed to him almost incredible. When she had finished, he remarked: "Well, I have always agreed that 'truth is stranger than fiction.' I had not the least suspicion that my old ruins contained any hidden treasure."

This made Margaret start. "Oh," she cried, "the jewels are yours, Fauvel, not mine! They were found on your property. I never thought of that before! Oh — have I been a thief all this time!"

"Never mind that now, Margherita," he said, smiling, "and I will forgive the thief, if there is one."

Then they discussed Clemente's actions, and came to the conclusion that he wanted to punish her for going away; so he had made her desertion the only cause of the suicide in which Fauvel had allowed all at Rocca Serrata to believe. Clemente had no doubt of the murder, but why blacken the young master's memory to a heartless woman? So he evidently reasoned, and dreadful had been the consequences of his suppression. If Margaret had known all she must have got in touch with Fauvel to tell him the truth. Now between them they must find Leone and establish his innocence. There was one person influential enough to help them — Prince Estori.

After dinner Fauvel returned to find how Margaret was and to say that he had phoned the Palazzo Estori and found

that the Prince was away on his yacht. Meantime Fauvel would go in search with letters strong enough to open monastery doors. As he rose to go Margaret noticed that he walked lame.

"I was injured in a railway accident shortly after this event," he replied to her inquiry. "My baggage was demolished and with it my address book — that made it difficult to communicate with you, and I was in no mood to try very hard to reach one who appeared so indifferent to all I thought she loved. Pardon me, *ma chère*. We must yet fathom the mystery of those lost letters. My lameness — that is my little affliction. We all need courage."

After Giacinta had gone to bed Margaret still sat up wide awake. Had the frightful well of her visions given up its dead only to cast him into some dark monastery where they would never meet again?

Had two people ever loved as devotedly and intensely as she and Leone? Even their small quarrels had not marred it, for the making up had been so sweet. And now that same little shabby "Signora Belmonte" who had been Queen of Love in the old castle, had changed into the rich and lonely "Miss Randolph," whom people called "*lucky*" — how little they knew!

She opened her trunk. Finding a box, she brought out a dried rose that had once been fresh and red. She had found it in the Church of the Gesù where a young monk had been kneeling. Rose of Destiny!

She took up a lock of short hair raven black and pressed it to her lips. "Amore," she whispered, "is this all I will ever have of you?" Next there was a tiny shoe. "Little slaughtered lamb!" she murmured, and the small tomb on the mountainside came to her mind where she had made her baby's bed for the last time. There was one more trinket, a ring of reddish gold, hammered by some craftsman two thousand years ago into an unbroken circle — emblem of unending love.

She shook the diamond and ruby rings from the third fir—

of her left hand and slipped the ancient one on in their place. "My *marriage ring!*" she breathed. "Amore, do you remember our wedding night? The moon was my 'Maid of Honor' and the stars were our guests, and we walked toward the altar of love to the low, sweet chant of a nightingale; and after the consummation of our union, that wonderful gift of God to man and woman, sanctified by great love, we arose to the music of the lark which was our recessional. I was your true wife, Leone, and I will keep faith with you always; no other man shall ever take your place."

## CHAPTER XXVII

### AN ORDER FROM ROME

God make thee good as thou art beautiful,  
Said Arthur, as he dubbed him Knight.

TENNYSON.

In the island of Sardinia, on a bare cliff, facing the sea, remote and desolate, stands a grim fortress-like monastery, belonging to the Trappist Fathers. A perpetual silence is imposed upon this order.

There is a steep, stony path going down to the shore, that is seldom used, for the little chapel-shrine, to which it leads, is but a ruin. It was said that in days gone by miracles had been worked at this shrine, but now it stands in solitude, for no one visits it. Occasionally an old hag passes collecting driftwood, or a fisherman takes shelter there, and by day and night the sad sea breaks at its door.

It was yet the small hours of the morning and that heavy darkness that comes before dawn enveloped the earth, then the first cold gray of the matinal twilight succeeded the blackness, the pale stars become fainter and disappeared and objects took on weird shapes.

Inland the great forest of cork trees stirred as if awaking. The gaunt pile of stones with its towering cross became a habitation and a human figure was visible, moving upon the promontory. It was a monk, and he began to descend the steep path leading to the shore.

Below, the waters of the Mediterranean dashed against the rocky point of land upon which the ruined chapel stands, drenching its broken walls with spray, while close by crested waves broke into soft foam upon a stretch of sandy beach. The monk stood there and gazed far out across the sea. It was Easter morning. Yonder was the world he had left.

But he was dead to that world forever and a crushing grief was consuming him, to which he could not become resigned. "Why was he not actually dead?" he asked himself, for this was a living death, an entombed death, the condemnation to silence without distraction in the confines of the monastery grounds, in the perpetual suffering of solitude upon the ruins of a love and a faith.

Once he had taken pride in cultivating rare red roses, now he worked in the coarse medicinal garden, and for recreation he had only this walk to the sea.

The monk had been sent here, where as a penance for sin it was forbidden to hold speech with any one. At his first coming the place had seemed a grateful asylum; here he could hide himself and could weep in peace, not for his sin but for his loss, for his dead child and its mother.

Where was she, the girl he had idolized? Was she across the Great Water in her own land? That was why he loved to come down close to the sea, it brought him nearer to her.

What had become of her? Was she mixing in the gaieties of the world with his false friend, who believed him dead, while he was here in this desolate place, in silent suffering, because he had loved her too well? Often he felt how preposterous was that story, but he could never wholly put out the flame of jealousy. Why had she left him so cruelly? In the women of his race such unwifely conduct, for so it looked to him, could mean but one thing.

He had performed every hard duty of the imposed penance to the very letter of the law, and the superiors were well pleased with him, but he was merely accepting his fate as one of those individual lives that must be sacrificed for the good of the whole.

Under his calm exterior, in such excellent control, the wound was raw and bleeding.

To-day the prescribed period of his penance was completed. What would they do with him now? He knew that his su-

periors were hoping that he would ask to become a member of the Trappist Order and eventually be ordained a priest. If he could but know the truth about Margherita, mayhap he could give his life to God with a better devotion. But he could never take any steps to learn of her; he was helpless, penniless. His brethren had believed in his innocence, he could bring no scandal on those who had saved him. To the world he was a dead man.

He threw out his arms with a gesture of despair, then he sank down on the sand, with his elbows upon his knees and his chin resting in his hands. How exhausted he was, with the vigil since Holy Thursday Eve and weak from a long fast! Ah! Margherita might forget him, but if there were life after death his child loved him still, and could they once more be united he would bear the long dreary years ahead of him with patience and hope. Did any other father ever long with such intensity to have his infant back in his arms? His lonely arms!

A sigh that was more of a groan escaped him, a mist gathered in his eyes, and two great tears dropped upon the coarse serge of his habit, and the waves rolled on in their monotony, while a man's heart was breaking.

Something was moving near the ruined chapel. Was it a piece of white sail-cloth from some wreck being blown gently in his direction? No — it was a living thing crawling toward him — it was a child! God — it was his child! What was this vision, what did it mean? Ah, he had not slept and had kept such a rigid fast that his nerves had given way, and this was some delusion of a distraught brain.

Nearer and nearer the child came, dragging itself along, for it could never walk again, and behind it, upon the sand over which it had crawled, was a red streak — blood! Christ the merciful, spare him this! He closed his eyes to shut out the sickening sight.

He felt a gentle touch. He opened his eyes; the child was close behind him, the little face pale and drawn with suffering.

looked up at him with an expression that recalled its mother.

He stooped and took it in his arms, and the child gave a weary, contented sigh as it nestled against his heart, while his tears flowed like a woman's, wetting the dark ringlets on the child's head that had pillowed itself in its old accustomed place.

Up above where the monastery stood the bells began to ring out for the first Mass of Easter. He dried his eyes and looked down upon the sweet features. Some change had been wrought. The little face now bore a smile of such unearthly beauty that it dazzled his eyes to behold, and, oh — *Madre di Dio!* and all the saints, see, bear witness — fair and perfect and whole, as the day it was born, it was actually standing up upon its father's knees.

"Amore!" he cried, as he folded the child to his heart, "*Amore mio!*"

Then two little soft arms wound themselves around his neck, and the fresh baby lips were pressed upon his own, and now he closed his eyes for very rapture. He believed that when he opened them his son would be gone, but he no longer wished to keep him, for his baptized little one had looked upon the face of its Heavenly Father, and what earthly parent could keep it from that joy?

Gently he relaxed his hold, parting his arms until they were stretched out wide, then he opened his eyes. The child had vanished. He fell upon his knees making the sign of the cross. "'The Lord gave, and the Lord taketh away!'" he cried. "'Blessed be the Name of the Lord!'"

When he looked up the sun was rising, and he saw that what he had taken for a trail of blood upon the sand was a red streak of the dawn.

The bells were finishing their call. He rose and bounded up the steep path like a boy, for he had left his burden below by the sea.

After mass and refectory he walked alone to the cliff to meditate a few moments upon the supernatural thing that had hap-

pened. The sun was shedding its golden glory, a white gull was twinkling in the blue sky, and a beauty and peace prevailed.

As he stood there some strange force seemed to be overpowering him, lifting him out of his apathy to a higher and different sphere. He no more thought of Margherita with sickening longing, nor did he wish to die; he believed there was some special mission in store for him, and whatever it might be he was ready to accept it cheerfully, for his lost faith had returned to him. Had some balm distilled from the baby lips of his child reached his torn heart, or was it that higher power, "*Only speak the word and my soul shall be healed*"?

While he breathed in the salt air he felt a touch upon his shoulder, and turned to see a very old monk, almost petrified with age and thus unfit for any active or responsible duties, delegated to the task of messenger to go in search of the different members of the community when they were called for by their Superiors. By a form of sign language he gave Fra Felice to understand that the Father Abbot desired to see him at once, then turned and shambled off again.

Fra Felice followed immediately. The old monk led him along endless corridors, whitened in lime, all so alike that one might easily become lost in their windings. Stopping before a padded leather curtain hanging in an archway to keep off draughts, the antediluvian lifted it for Fra Felice to pass through a smaller corridor, at the end of which he was conducted into a room entirely of stone, where a life-sized crucifix, ghastly realistic, was the most prominent object. The rosy morning light came in through the high-barred windows, brightening the cheerless chamber. At a table sat the Abbot with a young monk who acted as his secretary. Beneath their feet was stretched a long rug made of goat skins, for the floor was damp and upon the table were some letters which the observing eyes of Fra Felice noticed bore the red seal of the Vatican.

The Abbot dismissed his secretary and the old messenger, and Fra Felice was left alone with him. The Abbot went through

the formula of giving him permission to speak, and then said, "Fra Felice, do you understand that with this date of the calendar expires the period prescribed by the Father General of the Franciscans to be spent by you here in prayer and repentance?"

Fra Felice inclined his head, "Yes, *Reverendissimo*."

The Abbot had keen blue eyes and a nose like an eagle's beak; it was a strong, intelligent face, and the younger man felt that the older man was looking him through and through.

"As far as human mind can judge, there is no fault to find with you. You have been obedient, prompt and regular in all your duties. That you have strictly and conscientiously performed your penances I believe to be true. Have you any preference as to your future?"

"Most Reverend Father, I have no choice. Wherever it may please God and my Superiors to send me, there I shall endeavor to serve them."

The Abbot took up one of the letters with the Papal seal and said, "Some one with greater authority than the Head of your Order, or the Head of mine, has decided it for you. I merely asked you this question to find out the true state of feelings. The Holy Father orders you to come at once to Rome."

Fra Felice staggered.

"To Rome!" Back to Rome where there would be so much to remind him of Margherita, of Fauvel; where Life, such as he knew it now, had been a closed book!

"Yes, to Rome," repeated the Abbot, "where His Holiness will further instruct you."

Fra Felice was perplexed.

"Is it permitted, *Reverendissimo*, to ask why the Holy Father should honor me like this?"

"There is a matter of great moment on hand, my son. Two weeks ago your relative, Prince Estori, his wife and child, were cruising in their yacht near Malta, when it capsized in a squall and all on board were lost excepting one of the crew."

"Daniele drowned! Oh, my poor cousin! All lost? Ah, *Dio mio* — that is shocking!"

He had been fond and proud of Daniele Estori, and had admired him as a man of the world of excellent type, and now he was cut down in his prime, not only himself but his son, and a pang went through him like a knife. There would be no one now to carry on the line; the Estoris would die out!

"Yes," the Abbot said, "it is a most sad event and with this tragic death of an entire family ends a long line of noble and devout men and women, noted for their loyalty to the Vatican, their generosity to the Church and the good example of their lives."

Fra Felice bent his head; the last word sounded like a personal thrust. He was the only "black sheep," then. This news was a cruel blow to him. Inborn in every Italian of the higher class is an intense love of family and pride in its welfare and now the old name was already a thing of the past. The priceless heirlooms, the portraits, the jewels, the ancient estates would be scattered among strangers, and there would be no one to recount proudly the deeds of their ancestors and sooner or later they would all be forgotten.

Again the Abbot spoke: "Perhaps you are aware that there is a large estate to be arranged. Physicians have helped to decide that the Princess died first, the boy next and the Prince himself last, so it remains indisputably the property of the Estoris."

"But," interrupted Fra Felice, "there are no Estoris left. I am the last of our race — *I*, a poor monk."

"You are the heir-at-law, that is why the Pope sent for you to return to Rome."

Ah, he understood now! He was the next of kin, and the Holy Father wished to see him concerning the property, which he would of course be expected to make over formally to the Order of St. Francis, as "*poverty*" was the first of his vows, and on account of it and his noble blood there might be some

compromise on hand, some position offered him at the Vatican, and his boyish dream of a Cardinal's hat came again to his mind.

"Ah, yes," he said, "I understand; I am wanted in Rome to sign necessary papers resigning my personal claims. When does it please you, my Father, that I should leave?"

"To-morrow; but, my son, you do not quite understand. These letters from the Holy Father came some days since, but it being Holy Week mundane matters might not be discussed. You are the lawful heir, and," glancing at the letter, "it appears that several years ago a deathbed statement reached the Pope explaining certain injustices done you in usurping your father's property and placing you in a monastery while you were too young to have any voice in the matter yourself. For this reason (as well as the other) our Holy Father, the Pope, does not consider it wise that so old and noble a family as that of which you are the last representative, should die out; a family whose sword has always been drawn for the defense of the Faith and whose late members have had the interests of Catholic Italy so much at heart, must live, must be continued, to serve as devotedly and loyally in the future as in the past, for the Church to-day in our beloved country has more need to increase its faithful laity than to enrich its cloisters. Therefore His Holiness has exempted you from your monastic vows. You are not expected to renounce the property, but to hold it for the honor of God and your fellow men."

During this speech Fra Felice had leaned over the table with both hands pressed upon it so that not a word might escape him, forgetting the deferential attitude that should be observed in the presence of his Superior, his eyes growing larger and larger with amazement.

"I am to keep the property?" he asked, in a bewildered tone, "I?"

To him it was incredible. He could not comprehend this *thing* in its fullness. He was a monk; he had been set apart

from boyhood for the religious life and though he had lapsed and fallen, the four years spent among the rigid Trappists on the lonely Sardinian coast had made that episode of the old castle in the Umbrian Mountains like a dream, and a certain monkish dread of contact with the world made him recoil from entering it again.

"Yes," replied the Abbot, as he looked into the wondering, searching face, "you not only inherit the property, but the title as well. You are to discard your habit, marry, and continue your distinguished line."

Fra Felice stood still, staring as if the news had rendered him dumb, and the Abbot, seeing that he was utterly confounded, said kindly, "Kneel, my son, and receive my blessing for your new life."

Obediently he knelt. The Abbot stood, and as he blessed him, looked down upon the pure chiseled features, the lowered eyes with their sweeping lashes and the noble brow of the man before him, and his extraordinary beauty struck him; involuntarily the stern ascetic added a mental prayer: "And may God keep thy soul as fair as He has made thee fair of face."

Fra Felice rose and the Abbot, bowing, said, "I salute you, Prince Estori."

Not until he heard himself thus addressed did he comprehend the full import of what had happened. The sound of the beloved, familiar title had a magical effect; it sent the sluggish blood leaping through his veins. Straightening his shoulders, he stood erect, and, throwing back his head with the old proud gesture, he exclaimed: "*Viva il Papa! \* Viva Roma!! Viva Estori!!!*"

\* Long live the Pope.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### TWO LITTLE SHOES

And as Hope bends low at parting  
For a death remembered tone,  
We searched the land that Beauty  
And Love had made their own.

And scarce our mood was broken,  
Of near impending loss,  
To find at the bend of the pathway  
A Station of the Cross.

JOHNSON.

Rome had been stirred by the Estori yacht tragedy. Fra Felice Estori, the next of kin, had mysteriously disappeared eight years before, and presumably was dead, but the daily papers hinted that the Vatican knew where to find him, and the gossips were watching to see if the "*Osservatore Romano*" would confirm this report.

Meanwhile avoiding notoriety, the heir of the Estoris was quietly installed in the ancestral *palazzo* trying to accustom himself to this tremendous change and new surroundings, and he roamed through the rooms with their atmosphere of serene dignity trying to realize that the obscure monk, exiled under a cloud, had suddenly become a rich and influential nobleman.

In the great *salone* family portraits of cardinals, court ladies and princes in the costume of the "Noble Guard," stared down upon him, making him feel like an intruder. A long line of crystal chandeliers were multiplied in mirrors at either end, and he would start as he caught sight of his own reflection in a black suit of the latest cut, and it would substantiate the idea that this was mourning for his dead kinsmen, and that he was in truth himself.

Again the new prince would stand in the antechamber of his

home, his, this lonely, luxurious palace, and his eyes would rest with pride upon the arms of the Estori emblazoned underneath a crimson canopy supported by gilded spears, and it would remind him that he was the last representative and so soon as the period of mourning should expire, he must marry.

But he could not forget his lost love; she was constantly in his thoughts; he was considering a trip to look for her, but here his *amour propre* came in. She had deserted him in a heartless, cruel, and unwarranted manner, and might even now be in company with his false friend Fauvel, and though Margherita was the only being upon earth he longed for, circumstances had changed; the woman he made his wife must be worthy of the noble name he had to give her.

How he and Margherita had looked forward to the day when they might be free to come out of their seclusion and be truly man and wife before the world! Ah, well, that dream was over! Some lady of wealth and position would be chosen for him by those who were taking an active interest in his affairs, and marriage now would be cold-blooded, diplomatic, and perfunctory.

A footman appeared with a note on a silver salver and waited while Prince Estori opened and read it.

"Oh," he exclaimed, half to himself, "Padre Carlo dying and asks to see me! Yes, I will come, but — but —" It was the one spot in Rome he most wished to avoid; it was too full of memories, but, yes, he must go.

"Will his Excellency have the car?" asked the man.

"No, no," Estori answered; "I will walk," and the man bringing his hat, he left the house.

On the other side of the city Margaret Randolph waited existing only for Fauvel's letters which had not been encouraging, but to-day he had wired: "Will be back to-night with some news." Margaret was too nervous to remain in the hotel; not knowing where she would go, she set out and by some impelling force her steps turned in the direction of the *Colosseum*.

past the Arch of Titus, and up the old walk where a "Via Crucis" met her eyes. What did those two words, "some news," mean? Fra Felice had once intended to become a priest. He had never written her or tried in any way to hear from her since he had been back among the monks. So even should he be the heir of the Estoris, was it not too late? Up the hill she walked, the Stations of the Cross leading up also, being drawn as by a magnet to the monastery at the end. And was a monastery to be the end? She sat down upon a flat stone and buried her face in her hands.

As Margaret reached the top of the hill a stranger began the ascent below. What memories this place recalled to him! He had been happy here until a young girl had found her way into this picturesque path, and he had learned heights and depths of a love that had changed the whole course of his life.

Margaret heard steps approaching and put down her thick mourning veil. There was an easy, patrician swing to the man's long, graceful strides. Everything about him was familiar except his dress.

She rose suddenly. "Signore —" she ventured. He stopped and raised his hat. His hair was black and his eyes were tawny brown, his features classic, his mouth though beautiful, had a rather stern expression, unusual in one still young.

"Signorina?" he responded, waiting.

The rich tone of his voice was unmistakable.

"Leone," she whispered questioningly, "Leone?"

"Who are you?" he asked.

She raised her veil and confronted him.

"Margherita!" he cried, in unspeakable agitation. "Margherita mia!" He could scarcely restrain himself from catching her in his arms, but she had treated him shamefully, and his years of suffering and self-control now came to his aid, and as she moved toward him he retreated.

"Why, Leone," she exclaimed, in broken bewilderment, "are you not glad I have come — come —" In her nervous excite-

ment all the past of their separation had become but a dark blur and what was clear was that her beloved stood before her.

"To break my heart a second time?"

"No," she cried; "to clear your name."

"That is past and gone, Margherita; I have lived it down."

She fell back, crushed and numb.

Could this distant man be her Leone, her darling, her love?

"What brought you here?" he asked.

"To — to find you, I believe," she faltered.

"But it is not officially known that I am in Rome. My dear old Superior, Padre Carlo, is dying — he wished to see me once more, and I have made all haste to get to him. Where have you been all these years?" The question came out despite his will.

"At my own home in America."

"But — no — Carlotta said —" He stopped, pale as death, and though his speech was confused, his eyes looked sternly into hers.

"What did Carlotta say?" sharply.

"That you had gone to Paris with Fauvel."

"Leone!" This time Margaret drew away from him in horror. "Leone, and you believed her!"

"I wrote asking you to deny the charge, but you never did."

"I never received the letter! Nor had any word from you whatever," she answered indignantly. "I meant to come right back to you, but I was taken ill — Clemente wrote you had drowned yourself. I wrote you three letters which were returned. I've mourned for you for four years — remained unmarried — faithful to you even in death —" her sweet voice broke into a pathetic appeal, "Oh, Leone, don't you love me any more?"

The ground seemed shaking under his feet with the great wave of returning confidence. "Love you, Margherita — love you?" he said. "Ah, that is a poor, weak word! But — but — I must go in to the Padre at once, he is dying; I dare not

delay." Then quickly: "Where may I see you this evening?"

"At the Palace Hotel," she answered tremulously, with a fast-beating heart.

"It's all so wonderful," Margaret said, as she, Fauvel and Prince Estori sat together in her apartment basking in each other's society with a pile of unopened letters before them.

"Yes," Fauvel was saying, "Carlotta intercepted these for reasons of her own, and then with the superstitious inconsistency of her sex, she never broke the seals. In my hasty trip to Rocca Serrata I stopped at Santoni's — he is postmaster, if you remember — we all should have remembered that fact more attentively; it might have helped us see through mysteries that have been terribly dark to us all. I found Carlotta married and on the eve of leaving for South America with her husband. She took me aside and confessed keeping these letters and returned them to clear her conscience for her new life."

"Here is the letter I wrote you, Margherita, from Assisi," Leone said. "I could not remember your sister's address and sent it to Rocca Serrata, in hopes it would be forwarded — I got some one to direct it, as my handwriting was known —"

"And here are my letters to you, Fauvel," Margaret said — "this one to Paris, this one to Perugia, and they all followed you to Rocca Serrata, to be stolen by her!"

"It was robbing the royal mail," said Leone severely.

"This is the letter, then," Fauvel remarked, "that was written when you were first back among your friends, the monks?"

"Don't speak lightly of monks, Meurice," Leone said shortly. "Had not monks sheltered, concealed, and nursed me, I would have been seized as a felon. I owe it to monks that I am spared the public disgrace of having fallen in my monastic life. The world now thinks that when Fra Felice Estori disappeared from it that he went directly to Sardinia

and buried himself with the Trappist Fathers, so my reputation is unsoiled. The man in the cloister may do as much for the cause of 'Humanity,' your great creed, as the man in the world."

"My dear friend," Fauvel answered, "I quite agree with you. I too would not be here this moment had it not been for monks. Humanitarianism *was* once my first creed, but when I lay pinned under that railroad wreckage expecting each second to be my last, it was in those awful moments, and from monks, that I learned another. The bravest men among the rescuers were Franciscan monks, risking their lives to save others and administer the Sacrament to the doomed ones. I watched the holy look of the faithful. I asked them to pray for me."

"Meurice!"

Leone sprang from his seat and held out his hand.

Fauvel also rose.

"I led you astray, Estori," he said, taking it in a firm grasp, "and Margherita, I took advantage of your helplessness, and I now ask your joint forgiveness."

"Need you ask it, old friend?" Leone said warmly, while Margaret took Fauvel's other hand and stroked it, saying:

"You've never been anything to me but dear and kind and good."

"Bless you, bless you, my children," Fauvel said, smiling. "Now I am going in to talk to Giacinta, and will leave Prince Estori and Mademoiselle Randolph to themselves."

Fauvel's words suddenly put a barrier between them. The old relationship had gone forever. "Prince Estori" was, and was not Leone, just as "Miss Randolph" was, and was not Margherita. They had become conventional with the formalities and responsibilities that position and wealth required of them. Margaret in a semi-evening costume of filmy black relieved by a long string of shimmering pearls, looked lovelier than ever in Leone's eyes, and he, faultlessly dressed, had that

well-groomed, high-bred air that all women admire, and each stood just a little in awe of the other.

"If Fauvel wronged us," Leone began, "I wronged poor Ferruccio. If I had not been wicked to him you need never have kept him a secret —"

Then to the woman's heart came an inspiration.

"I have one more secret from you, Leone," she said, and leaving him for a moment she returned with something in her hand. "You thought everything was destroyed," she continued, "but I kept this," and she laid upon the table an infant's shoe, charred by flames. "It belonged to — your child," she said very softly, then her words came lower still, "to — my child."

Leone stared at it. He thought there was only one such left from a pyre of his own kindling. Taking from his pocket an old worn wallet, he brought out the counterpart of the tiny shoe and laid it beside its mate.

"Our child, Margherita," he said, with a choke in his voice, "they belonged to our child." Then she felt herself pressed to his heart.

Once more his arms were around her, once more she heard him say, "*Amore, Amore, mio*," and she was at rest. It was so sweet and delicious that it made all the sad years seem as nothing. They talked on regardless of the hour.

"Half-past eleven, my prince," Fauvel called, coming to the door; "it's time for us to be going."

"Five minutes more, dear old Meurice," Leone called back, "give me five minutes more. We have not yet said 'Good night'!" Fauvel turned away with an indulgent smile.

"How soon before there shall be no 'good nights'?" Leone whispered to Margaret. "Now that I have seen thee again, I cannot wait — I am starved for love."

Those marvellous tawny eyes, beautiful and seductive, "like melted stars," were looking into hers; through their soft light she could see the fire in their depths, and her whole being an-

swered to his as he drew her closer and closer. But she broke from his passionate embrace. Circumstances had changed with her also; she was not going to be lightly won.

If Prince Estori wished to make her his wife she would be properly wed in her own country.

"You must come to my home first," she said, "and marry me from there."

"I will come to the end of the world for thee!"

## CHAPTER XXIX

### TESTED AND TRUE

I love thee, I love but thee  
With a love that shall not die  
Till the sun grows old,  
And the stars are cold,  
And the leaves of the Judgment  
Book unfold.

BAYARD TAYLOR.

Villa Estori is situated upon Lake Thrasymene. A flight of marble steps lead down to the lapping water. Tall shade trees relieve the sunny glare, and bushes of "Fra Felice" roses grow close to the white stucco walls of the house. The Prince and Princess Estori were in residence there and had with them, informally, a few old friends.

Upon the lake was a handsome motor-launch with the Italian flag at its bow and the "Stars and Stripes" at its stern. Under its awning were seated Prince Estori and his godmother, Donna Bianca Salviata. Standing beside the balustrade that ran along the little pier was the Princess Estori, looking very fair and sweet in a white gown, and holding a pink-lined parasol to shield her eyes from the dazzling water while she conversed with a tall young man, once her pupil, Raul Tardieu.

On the terrace above, leisurely leaning against a pedestal that upheld a marble nymph, with his pet, the macaw, upon his arm, Fauvel was smoking a cigarette, his companion, Madame Tardieu, was smoking also, and talking over the old studio days in Rome.

Sitting upon an upper balcony, the beads of her rosary slipping quietly through her fingers, a sweet-faced elderly Italian woman kept watchful eyes upon a lovely sturdy boy of three years who was being amused by a young page on the grass

below, while she occasionally called down some direction to a nurse who was wheeling a tiny infant in its American baby carriage.

A butler appeared with a tea tray, telling the page to row out to the Prince's launch and say that tea was served; and the little boy, finding himself deserted by his playfellow, ran over to Fauvel and embracing his leg, looked up at him with a pretty, affectionate smile, for Leonino dearly loved his "uncle."

Fauvel placed the macaw upon the shoulder of the marble nymph and stooping down lifted the child in his arms.

The Princess and Raul having sauntered up from the pier, took seats under the pergola near the tea table where the others joined them.

As the teacups were refilled the conversation drifted to the old mountain haunt of Fauvel.

"Yes, I still own it," the latter replied, in response to a question of Madame Tardieu.

"Meurice, will you not take us there some day in your new touring car?" she asked.

"I should be delighted," he replied, "what do our host and hostess say?"

The Princess made no answer, but looked out over the water.

"Margherita hesitates," Donna Bianca remarked; "I can see she does not want to leave her babies."

"Oh, Giacinta relieves me of all care—" Margaret began; then, glancing toward the Prince and Fauvel: "I will go gladly if Leone and Meurice think it best."

"I see no reason why you should not go, *ma chère*," Fauvel answered, catching her look and returning it with a reassuring one. "We might stop at the castle overnight. Raul and I could take Leone's car and go on the day before with a couple of the servants and try to make the place somewhat habitable; if you ladies can manage to undress by candlelight, etc.—"

And so it happened on the following Wednesday a squalid, sleepy hamlet crouched in a hollow below a giant rock, was

aroused by the appearance of a splendid touring car that slowed down as it approached; and a sodden, one-eyed peasant smoking his pipe on his doorstep, speculated upon the absurdity of the rich, who with all the country to choose from, should come here. "Friends of the *Proffessore Dottore Artista*," he soliloquized, who himself arrived yesterday, after a considerable absence, and was to stop a day or so at the old *Fortezza* high above.

One of the ladies in the car who was heavily veiled threw out handfuls of coins from a gold-mesh purse, and the gentleman in front beside the chauffeur, who had the air of a *grand signore*, kept his cap pulled down over his eyes while he tossed coppers to the little ones. Then their speed was increased to ascend a serpentine road where at the summit stood a picturesque castle, hoary with age, and slowly crumbling upon its crag.

As the party alighted in the courtyard, the hearts of the Prince and Princess were too full for words; they could only look at each other with a grasp of trembling hands.

After luncheon Fauvel conducted his guests over the castle, but Margaret excused herself on the grounds of fatigue, and she and Leone were left alone.

Free from restraint, they wandered once again through the familiar halls and corridors full of memories. Coming at last to the cedar room, they sat down to rest.

"Fauvel tells me," said Leone at length, "that he has picked up some gossip in the village. Old Santoni died last spring, and Carlotta is living in Buenos Aires, so there is nothing to bring her back here. Clemente and Lisa are dead also. Poor old Clemente, I can almost hear the jingle of his keys! Beppo emigrated to the United States, and Illario, our gardener and driver, is serving a term for using his knife in a brawl — there is the history of our household."

"I always said Illario looked like a cut-throat," Margaret answered. "But the village, dearest, can we not do something for these poor peasants? They are so forlorn! Did you

recognize Tamasso, the blacksmith? He looked more hopeless than ever. I felt quite guilty when I saw those wretched people; while we have so many blessings, they have nothing. Could we give them a school, a hospital, a moving-picture house?"

"I have thought the same thing, *carissima*. We will consult Meurice to-night, and what we do must be given through him."

They sat there a long time, living over again their former lives until they were disturbed by sound of voices echoing down the corridor, and not yet desiring to mingle with the others, they rose and leaving the house by the terrace door, strolled off in the direction of the ramparts.

Coming to a certain point, they paused, enjoying the perfumed air and superb view. Long ago one midsummer they had looked upon this same fair scene in their first rapturous, stolen love.

The valley lay in a golden haze and the hills were purple-tinged in the setting sun.

At last the Prince spoke. "Thou art so silent, Amore," he said; "of what dost thou think?"

"Of the old days," she answered. "I was wondering why we had to pass through so much before we could be as we are *now*?"

"Perhaps I can tell thee," he said, very gently, as he slipped his arm around her. "God saw that we were standing in such a fierce sunshine of love that it might scorch the souls within us, so He sent us into the shade. He kept us safe apart under the shadow of His wing, until He saw we were strong enough to live together by the light of His Faith in this wedded happiness which we now know. And so, *sposa mia*, let it be our prayer always that when this life is over, we may be found worthy at the last to stand together in the great radiancy of heaven, where there is 'neither marriage, nor giving in marriage.'"

## ENVOI

There is a winding mountain road where a weather-beaten shrine of the "Pieta" stands opposite an opening in the rugged hillside. A cypress tree raises skywards its tall spire, and the air is sweet with rosemary and resinous with pine.

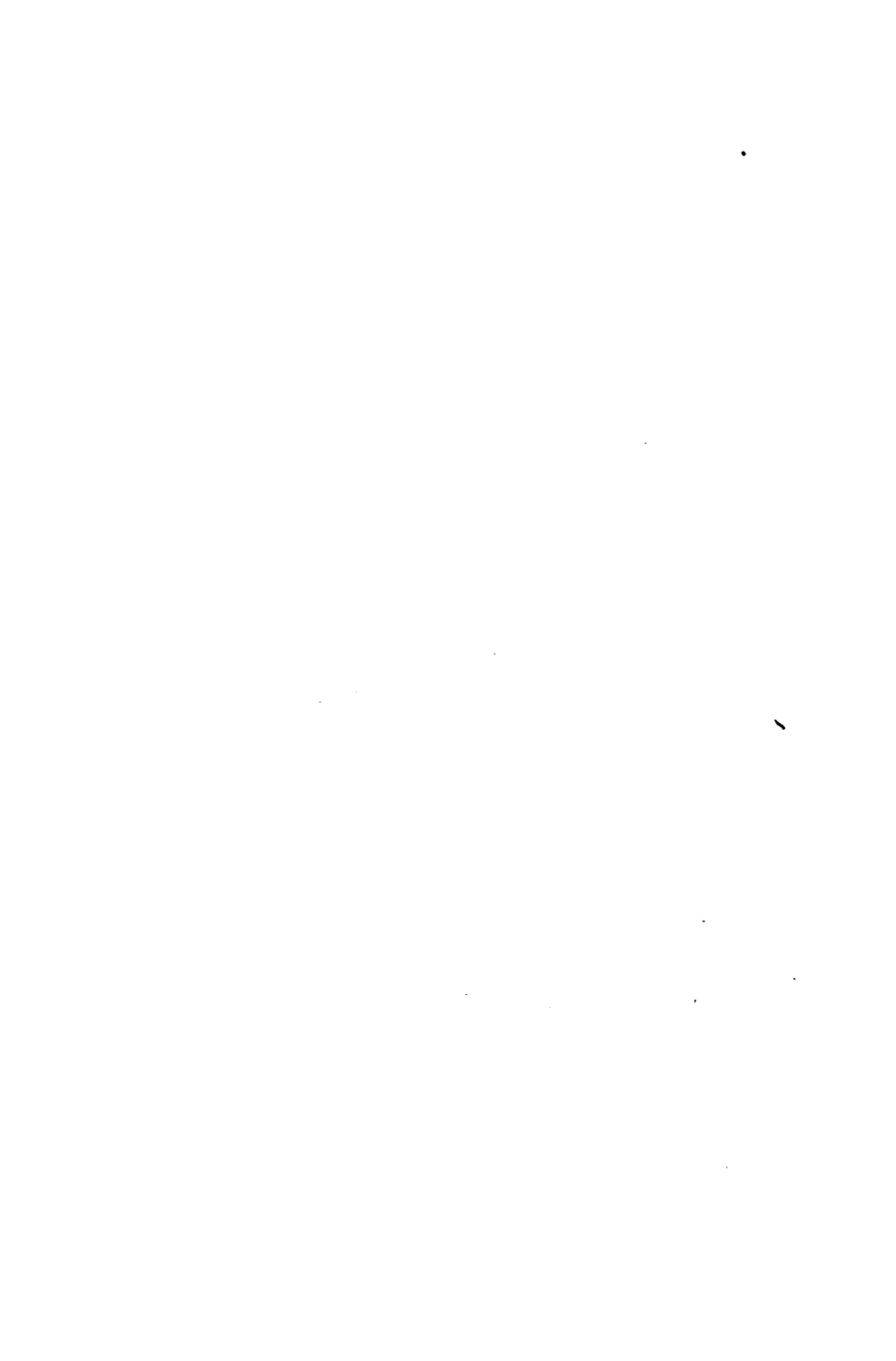
This once sequestered place is now frequently traversed by automobiles, and their occupants sometimes alight to drink from a stream of crystal water that flows musically down the high boulders that enclose a fairylike dell; and they wonder why a work of art has been placed in such a lonely spot.

It is a slender cross of pure white marble, and at its base, upon a bed of passion flowers, rests a little lamb. It is sacred to the peasants, and even to the wildest mountaineers, who reverence it as a shrine. There is nothing to denote why it is there, or what it means, but underneath, chiseled on the rock in a rough, unskilled hand, are five letters which form the word,

"AMORE"

1

THE END







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